R Christianus.

THE

Religious Eſtabliſhment

IN

SCOTLAND

EXAMINED

UPON

PROTESTANT PRINCIPLES:

A TRACT,

OCCASIONED BY

The late Proſecution againſt the late Reverend Mr. ALEXANDER FERGUSSON, Miniſter in KILWINNING.

Genus omne tyrannidis ingratum eſt: præcipue illud quod a mala adminiſtratione bonarum legum efficitur.

M. T. CIC.

LONDON:

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand; and J BALFOUR, at Edinburgh,

M.DCC.LXXI.

BRITISH MUSEUM

4947.
5 5
1/10

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the following papers we have a compleat State, comprehending both the hiſtorical and ſpeculative parts, of a late Hereſy Proceſs in Scotland. The greater part of the performance was written while the proceſs itſelf was yet depending, at a time when the rage of religious animoſity was at its greateſt height. In peruſing it, the Reader muſt, therefore, ſometimes tranſport his mind back to that period. If he take in this circumſtance, and conſider the ſituation of men's minds at that time, he will, we are perſuaded, be more diſpoſed to admire the moderation of the author, than to blame his aſperity.

A work of this nature, and compoſed in ſuch circumſtances, is intitled to many al-

lowances. The preſent came in ſeparate pieces, at that time, to Mr. Fergusſon, *without its being poſſible to trace the quarter from which it proceeded. It was not thought prudent by Mr.* Fergusſon's *friends to publiſh it before the proceſs was cloſed, on* his *account. Various accidents have ſince delayed it. Perhaps it was better to allow the minds of men to cool from* perſonal *debate, that the* general *part of the argument might have a fairer hearing. The papers were afterwards reviſed by ſome of the friends of Truth, and put in the beſt order poſſible. It is from a preſumption that they may do ſome good, as well as in conſequence of Mr.* Fergusſon's *particular and laſt requeſt, that they are now publiſhed.*

Hereſy, properly ſpeaking, is a departure from any part of our eſtabliſhed, religious Conſtitution. The Author of the following Tract does not offer himſelf to the Public in this ſituation. He exhibits a generous, and, as we think, an accurate view of the Conſtitution itſelf. Without derogating from our

Eſtabliſhment, he ſhews the probability that all our public articles may not be equally correct; and, accordingly, that our church does not, in fact, require a particular ſubſcription to them all. This argument is evidently of the greateſt importance, and the Orthodox cannot certainly have any objections to a calm diſcuſſion of it. The Author's notions upon this point, whether juſt or not, are highly honourable to our Eſtabliſhment; and to have the ſenſe of the Church upon her own regulations explained and finally aſcertained, appears to be the principal intention of his performance.

Proceſſes for Hereſy have deſervedly been brought into diſgrace. There is a ſet of men, however, at preſent in our Church, who, in oppoſition to experience and every liberal ſentiment, ſeem determined to revive their credit. Since the concluſion of the proceſs againſt Mr. Ferguſſon, *a new affair of the ſame kind has happened, ſtill, if poſſible, more ridiculous. A Gentleman, taking trials for the miniſtry, has been attempted to*

be

be ſtopt for what may be called Hereſies of Omiſſion. It will be neceſſary to explain myſelf, both to make the Reader comprehend a ſpecies of Hereſy ſo ſingular, I may ſay, ſo unprecedented, and to give ſome idea of the rigour of that ſyſtem which the Orthodox ſeem at preſent to have adopted. They do not charge him with having advanced any actual Hereſies, but with having omitted to introduce into his diſcourſe ſome orthodox doctrines, which he aſſerts, and the Church afterwards found, that his text did not lead him to conſider. It ſeems as if the ſupporters of Orthodoxy were not ſatisfied with a mere victory over human reaſon, unleſs they can alſo put to flight the impertinent rules of literary compoſition.—Theſe Gentlemen muſt be reminded, that, on every occaſion of this nature, there is an appeal to the humanity and general ſenſe of mankind. I have often thought that it would be doing an important ſervice to the cauſe of Religion in this kingdom, if the hiſtory of every ſuch proceſs were faithfully compoſed at the time it happens, and laid before the Public. This

is

is all that can be done by any friend of truth in a private capacity. The following performance gives us one history of this kind entire. The continuation of such an article, by a succession of persons possessed of the requisite materials, and equal to the undertaking, would make an interesting part of our Ecclesiastical Annals.

PRE-

PREFACE.

THE public ſhall be told the occaſion and deſign of the preſent publication in a few words. It is well known that our Clergy are at preſent, and have been for ſome time back, divided into two religious parties. The names by which they are commonly diſtinguiſhed, are the Orthodox and the preachers of Morality. It would be ſuperfluous to give particular definitions, as the terms themſelves are well underſtood in this country. Nor yet, is it ſufficient to ſay, that they are religious parties. It would be doing injuſtice to the one party not to take notice that the other has the eminent advantage of being ſupported by an *aged* conſtitution; which, though ſubject, like

other conſtitutions, to the infirmities of time, has not yet fallen; and which, among other articles of mere faith, its preſent defenders ſeem to believe *Infallible*.

In the Scots Magazine for April 1767, appeared a letter from a Clergyman of the latter faction to one of the former, ſubſcribed A. B. It relates to a ſynodical Sermon, preached and publiſhed ſome time before by the reverend gentleman to whom the letter is addreſſed. In this ſermon the preacher had proceeded upon the controverted points, with that deciſive tone natural to a party, who are ſufficiently ſenſible that they have nothing to dread either from the laws of their church, or from the prejudices of their audience. He did not, however, eſcape Mr. A. B. He wrote him this letter, which has ſince drawn ſo much of the public attention, and cauſed it to be delivered to him in the preſence of that Preſbytery of which he is a member. It was read publickly. It contains ſome ſevere,

ſevere, but, as was allowed by every body before the author was in danger of a proſecution, juſt animadverſions upon the uncharitable cenſures, and inflammatory conduct of many in that party. They threatened the writer with a proſecution. He contemned the threatning, and ordered the letter to be printed in the Magazine for his own vindication, and their advantage.

This was the ſignal of diſcord. *Extemplo turbati animi.* In return for the wholeſome, and ſeaſonable correction which he had beſtowed upon enormities long complained of; Mr. A. B, what could he expect leſs? was immediately overwhelmed with a torrent of holy abuſe. It is incredible to conceive what a number of conſciences were ſtung upon this occaſion. It would appear, from the noiſe which aroſe, and the engines which were put in motion, that there was hardly an orthodox brother in Scotland who did not apply more or leſs of that letter to himſelf. This circumſtance alone con-

vinces me of the propriety of its publication. The Gentleman to whom it is addreſſed, was conſoled by numerous ſympathies. He had reaſon to ſay, that it was not directed at him in particular; that it was a general cauſe. The world ſaid ſo too. Accordingly, like a true party-man, he became extremely paſſive. In the mean time, clamour ſucceeded clamour, and publications were heaped on publications. The authors of the Scots Magazine never had a more numerous correſpondence. Averſe at firſt, from motives of delicacy, to inſert a letter which ſeemed rather calculated to promote mirth than inflame reſentment; they afterwards, with leſs ſcruple, admitted pieces ſwelled with virulence, and the channel of their Magazine became ſtained with a tide of rage and foul language.

It was not the letter itſelf which attracted my attention ſo much as the noiſe which enſued, and the ſubſequent proſecution. When I firſt read that letter in

the Magazine, I conſidered it merely, what it really is, as a private reproof from one chriſtian to another; and as names were concealed, and only facts ſpecified, I conſidered the circumſtance of its being publiſhed as having no other effect than making the reproof general. But the party againſt whom it was directed, not receiving the reproof, it would ſeem, with the ſubmiſſion which became them, and having been ever as zealous to make *Heretics* as *Proſelytes*, found it convenient to conſider it in another light. Contrary, as I thought, to all the rules of gratitude, they inſtantly made it a church affair; and meditated to return the *reproof* in ſuch a manner, as that they might ſtand *unreproved* by their brethren, for ever after. For this purpoſe the uſual methods were purſued. Mr. A. B. was loaded with the formidable charge of *hereſy*. A debate was commenced in the Magazine, and a proſecution opened in our church courts, and a fama clamoſa excited through the kingdom, as if the

chriſtian religion had been denied, or, which is worſe, as if the confeſſion of faith itſelf had been burnt by the hands of the common hangman.

In peruſing their performances, it was the *manner* in which theſe Gentlemen reaſoned which principally ſtruck me. They charge Mr. A. B. with having publickly attacked ſome of the capital doctrines of this church, the very doctrines to which he had ſubſcribed his ſolemn aſſent at his admiſſion to the miniſtry. Granting it to be ſo—what is the conduct, which the love of truth natural to man, not to mention the ſpirit of chriſtianity claimed by proteſtants, points out on ſuch an occaſion? Is it not that, previous to all things, it ſhould be examined whether thoſe doctrines which he has ſo confidently conteſted are juſt or not? We, in particular, who have ſo many fatal inſtances, drawn from the experience of former ages, in our eye, ſhould certainly have ſome ſcruples to proſecute, or puniſh, or condemn a man in any reſpect, before

this

this enquiry be made, leſt we be afterwards found to have puniſhed him for ſpeaking the truth. Was this the conduct obſerved by Mr. A. B's. adverſaries? Inſtead of this, they treat him in the moſt *conſtitutional* manner; as a heretic, a diſſembler, as preſumptuous, as perjured—in ſhort, there is no repeating, without bluſhing for our fellow-creatures, the epithets with which they loaded him.

The world will be curious to know what Mr. A. B. had done to deſerve all this abuſe. What were the unlucky expreſſions which had ſo greatly irritated, and drawn down upon him the vengeance of thoſe maſters of Old Engliſh? Why he had ſaid, "that God makes us good, and we make ourſelves wicked; that our Saviour did not ſuffer eternal death; that it is uncharitable to judge harſhly of our brethren in the affair of ſubſcription; that declaiming againſt patronage has a tendency to create diſturbance in the country; that the doing public pennance is not an apoſtolical inſtitution; that hu-

man ſyſtems of divinity are not to be put in balance with the ſcriptures; that partial interpretations of the word of God are pernicious to truth; that it would be an advantage to miniſters of the goſpel to ſtudy the original languages; and, finally, which was worſt of all, he had aſſerted, in expreſs terms, that the apoſtle Paul was a better divine than Doctor Witherſpoon *."

While the debate ran high in the literary channel, and the minds of men were agitated by indecent publications; a proſecution was, at the ſame time, commenced in our church courts, which was managed with equal violence. As an hereſy proceſs is a curious enough phænomenon in this age, a ſhort hiſtory of this proſecution may not be unacceptable to the public.

At the Synod of Glaſgow and Ayr, which met at Irvine in October 1767, the orthodox party firſt made a concerted attack upon Mr. Ferguſſon. This at-

* See Appendix.

tack

tack was opened by an overture, from the commitee of overtures, to the ſynod, repreſenting, " that a letter from one Miniſter to another had been publiſhed in the Scots Magazine containing ſuſpicious ſentiments, and juſtifying the groſſeſt diſhoneſty in ſubſcription; that this letter was univerſally believed to have been written by a member of this ſynod, and of the Preſbytery of Irvine; and, therefore, moving that the Synod would take the affair into conſideration, and take what meaſures they ſhould ſee proper to remove the ſcandal." This overture, unexpected as it was by the other party, who were taken unprepared, was yet on the point of being thrown out with the contempt it deſerved. The utmoſt that the orthodox party could carry, and they carried it only by the Moderator's caſting vote, was that the Synod ſhould take notice of it ſo far as to expreſs, in general terms, their deteſtation at diſingenuity and equivocation in ſubſcription, and exhort their members to diſcourage ſuch principles,

principles. This meaſure was gone into by the moderate members becauſe it was looked upon as a decent burial of the affair, and they had no ſuſpicion that the ſcheme lay any deeper. In this, however, they were miſtaken.

For, the next morning, one James Maconnel, an obſcure, illiterate man, who had formerly been a ſoldier, and was at that time town drummer in the little village of Beith, preſented himſelf before the committee of overtures, and gave them a paper, written and ſigned by himſelf, expreſly charging Mr. Ferguſſon, miniſter of Kilwinning, with that letter, accuſing him of ſundry errors which he ſaid were contained in it, and offering to prove him the author if he ſhould deny it. The plan was now manifeſt. In the debate upon the overture of the day before, the moderate party had argued that the Synod, having no libel before them, could not properly proceed upon the affair; and inſiſted that thoſe who knew, ſhould name the author of the letter, and libel him.

This

This the high party, amidſt all their zeal for the glory of God, were cautious of doing for their own ſakes; as knowing that the conſequences of preſenting a libel, which might chance not to be properly ſupported, were frequently not at all agreeable. None of them had, therefore, the courage to take this ſtep; and this obſcure man, who, in any event, had nothing to loſe, offering himſelf at this juncture as Mr. Ferguſſon's accuſer, brought many in mind of the ſtory of Calvin and Servetus; and made them regard him as the tool of a faction, who employed him, at the ſame time, to execute their purpoſe, and to protect them from the conſequences of their own meaſures *.

* The very circumſtance of his offering a long libel to the committee on the morning after the debate, was ſufficient to lead people to this conjecture. It is not very probable that an illiterate man could have prepared ſuch a paper in ſo very ſhort a time. The libel, making its appearance at this criſis, had all the air of being precompoſed, and reſerved for this very occaſion. Upon this ſuppoſition, what a ſtrange ſcene have we before us?

It is a rule in our courts that every proceſs of this nature muſt begin at the Preſbytery in which the perſon who is libelled reſides, and proceed upwards. The conſequence, therefore, of this appearance of the drummer was, that he was told this was not the proper court; and that it was recommended to the Preſbytery of Irvine, where Mr. Ferguſſon reſided, if a particular accuſation was brought before them, or even though there was none, to take every proper ſtep in the affair.

The proceſs, rendered thus important by the recommendation of the Synod, was now, therefore, conducted to its beginning. In the month of November following, the drummer came to the Preſbytery of Irvine with his libel; in which he charged Mr. Ferguſſon with ſix or eight articles of hereſy, all of which he pretended to have collected from that letter. Happily for the church, the members of that Preſbytery were, in general, men of moderate principles. Senſible that the cauſe of truth had gained but little from ſuch proceſſes,

ceſſes, and that the violence with which they were generally purſued had deſervedly brought them into diſgrace, they reſolved to proceed with caution. In this wiſe reſolution they were ſupported by our form of proceſs itſelf, which expreſly preſcribes lenity and moderation, and ſeems calculated, as of purpoſe, to check the fiery zeal of bigots in theſe matters. Accordingly when the drummer preſented his libel, the Preſbytery ordered that paragraph in the form of proceſs to be read to him which appoints every perſon, before he accuſes a miniſter, to converſe with him, and to adviſe with ſome other miniſters of the ſame Preſbytery. The drummer was aſked if he had obſerved that rule; and, upon his anſwering in the negative, the Preſbytery returned his libel to him without reading it. Enraged at this check, ſo different from the treatment he had lately met with above, he took a raſh appeal to the Synod, which he afterwards withdrew.

Having

Having rectified his former omiſſion, he returned to the Preſbytery in February, and preſented his libel, which was read, entered in their minutes, and appointed to lye on the table till their next meeting. That meeting was in March, but being very thin, a circumſtance which was occaſioned by ſtormy weather, the former appointment was continued. In this the drummer acquieſced, and yet he thought it proper afterwards to give in a complaint to the Synod which met in April againſt unneceſſary delays. This complaint, tho' ſupported by all the eloquence of the high party, was ſo glaringly unjuſt that it was repelled. It could not, however, be ſaid to have anſwered no purpoſe. It ſerved to infuſe jealouſy into the minds of men concerning the intentions of the Preſbytery, and prevented the ſpirit of caſtigation, which was gone abroad, from falling away, or becoming languid.

The Preſbytery, at their meeting in May, reſolved to proceed in the buſineſs; but received a letter from the drummer

earneſtly intreating a further delay, though he had complained of them on this very account ſo lately to the Synod. The Preſbytery, willing to avoid every appearance of partiality, which might be occaſioned by taking any ſteps in his abſence that he might think to his prejudice, granted his requeſt.

Their next meeting was in July. A debate aroſe in this meeting whether ſuch a man as James Maconnel ought to be received as a proper libeller? It was the opinion of moſt of the members that he ought not, and that the Preſbytery ſhould take the affair into their own hands. At laſt, by way of deliverance, they pronounced the following general interlocutor. "The Preſbytery, judging it a dangerous thing, and ſeemingly contrary to the form of proceſs, to allow an illiterate man, and one not immediately concerned to libel a miniſter, eſpecially for *hereſy*, which requireth learning and prudence as much as zeal, have reſerved to themſelves liberty to apply theſe conſiderations afterwards

wards to the preſent caſe. In the mean time, they appointed a committee to have the whole affair under conſideration, to converſe with Mr. Fergusſon, and to report." This interlocutor was paſſed in the preſence of the drummer, and as no appeal was taken by him, he muſt be conſidered as having acquieſced in this, and the whole former proceedings of the Preſbytery.

In conſequence of the powers delegated to them by the Preſbytery, the committee accordingly met, and deſired a conference with Mr. Fergusſon. Mr. Fergusſon was at that time in ſo bad a ſtate of health, having long been in a declining way, that he could not bear the fatigue of a long converſation, and deſired another meeting of the committee. The committee reported this to the Preſbytery, which met in Auguſt; giving, at the ſame time, their opinion that Mr. Fergusſon's requeſt ought to be granted, and further expreſſing their hopes that, by this means, a way would be opened for terminating the affair

affair to the ſatisfaction of all concerned. In conſequence of this, the Preſbytery unanimouſly renewed the appointment of their committee. Upon this James Maconnel took an appeal to the Synod againſt repeated delays.

Two things may be here obſerved. 1ſt, The conduct of the Preſbytery in this whole affair was deliberate, juſt, agreeable to the form of proceſs, and ſuitable to the importance of the occaſion. The rules of procedure laid down by the church in ſuch caſes are expreſly calculated to promote caution, and to guard againſt precipitate meaſures. No delays had been made by the Preſbytery. Any interruptions which happened were owing either to the proſecutor himſelf, to the ſtate of the pannel, or to neceſſary accidents. 2d, The laſt appointment which the Preſbytery made was the only ſtep from which the proſecutor had any right to appeal. He had acquieſced in all the reſt. The Synod too, by repelling his laſt complaint, had confirmed the whole

proceedings of the Preſbytery previous to the interlocutor of July, on which their laſt appointment was founded. But this laſt appointment was ſo plainly conſequential of the former, it was ſo evidently, indeed, the only ſtep which the Preſbytery could take, that no appeal could, with any ſhadow of reaſon, be founded on it. An appeal, however, was, at all events, to be taken; the buſineſs was in danger of terminating peaceably; and it ſeemed as if the other party were reſolved, right or wrong, to force it out of the hands of the Preſbytery, and bring it before themſelves. Here the advantage of having ſuch a man as Maconnel for proſecutor began to be ſtill more evident. He did, on this occaſion, what no man who had any of the nicer feelings of propriety, or any regard to conſiſtency of conduct, would have done. He took an appeal, not againſt their laſt appointment; this he was taught to know could not poſſibly be ſuſtained, and yet it was the only ſtep he had a right to appeal from; but he took

an

an appeal againſt the whole former proceedings of the Preſbytery, proceedings in which he himſelf had formerly acquieſced; and, in this manner, carried the whole cauſe as it ſtood, and when it was on the point of being amicably terminated, forcibly before the Synod.

Accordingly, in this ſhape, in October 1768, before the Synod it came. The Preſbytery looked upon the appeal as ſo irregular and abſurd, that they thought it could not ſtand a hearing. To their ſurpriſe, however, they found that the drummer was liſtened to with attention; and, on putting the queſtion, "ſuſtain the appeal or not," the moderate party was outvoted, and it was carried "ſuſtain" by a majority of nine. Upon this the Preſbytery appealed to the next general aſſembly.

In the afternoon the debates became warmer. It was propoſed to reſume the affair, and, among other things, to conſider a requiſition contained in the reaſons of appeal offered by the drummer, that

the Synod ſhould take the proſecution into their own hands. Here a diſcovery was made which I ſhall relate in this place, not ſo much on account of its own importance, or the effects it produced on the cauſe, as that it ſerves to mark the ſpirit of this court. The requiſition given in by the drummer, which was the preſent ſubject of debate, was contained in an extract of the proceſs before the Preſbytery of Irvine, which he had offered to the court. An extract of this kind, that it may be authenticated, and, as ſuch, come properly before a court, muſt be ſubſcribed by the Clerk of Preſbytery. This is a neceſſary form, without which no court can legally proceed upon any paper of this nature. The extract which the drummer preſented on this occaſion was, in fact, ſo ſubſcribed; but, upon examination, it appeared that ſeveral lines of the requiſition contained in it had been eraſed, and that the extract itſelf was interlined in many places by a hand different from the Preſbytery clerk's.

The

The drummer being heard at the bar upon this point, confeſſed that he had made the eraſements and interlineations with his own hand, and without the knowledge of the clerk of Preſbytery; aſſerting at the ſame time, that there were no material alterations, and that ſome of them were intended to rectify the miſtakes of the clerk, who did not ſeem to underſtand all the words in the original copy which he himſelf had given him. Upon this the Preſbytery of Irvine proteſted that the former ſentence of the Synod was void and null, and craved that the Synod would found no further procedure upon a vitiated extract. The Synod, however, paid no regard to this informality. The drummer was not ſo much as cenſured for his temerity. The queſtion was inſtantly put, "Proceed or not?" and the moderate party were again outvoted, and it was carried "proceed" by nearly the ſame majority as in the forenoon. The Synod, then, without breathing, entered upon the cauſe. It was now late, and a conſiderable

ſiderable part of the minority, either thinking that nothing more of conſequence would be done at that dyet, or deſpairing to ſtem the torrent, had left the houſe. The high party had now inconteſtably obtained the victory, and they did not fail to purſue it. The whole affair was in their own hands, and they continued long to deliberate how they might beſt improve their preſent advantage. Three meaſures were propoſed. 1ſt, That they ſhould raze the whole minutes of the day, and remit the affair to the Preſbytery with inſtructions. 2d, That they ſhould condemn the Letter and Appendix publiſhed in the Magazine, and diſmiſs all further proſecution againſt Mr. Ferguſſon. 3d, That, agreeable to the appellants requiſition, they ſhould take the proſecution into their own hands, and appoint a committee with powers for this purpoſe. Conſidering the preſent temper of the houſe, it is hardly neceſſary to name which of theſe meaſures was gone into. The third was carried by a very great majority. In conſequence of

this vote, the cauſe was taken out of the hands of the Preſbytery, and a committee of twenty miniſters and five or ſix elders were appointed to meet during the receſs of the Synod, and ſuch of the Preſbytery of Irvine as might chuſe to join them, with full powers to carry on a proſecution againſt Mr. Ferguſſon, and to bring the affair to an iſſue. Againſt this laſt meaſure, not only the Preſbytery of Irvine, but a majority of miniſters of the Synod itſelf, proteſted, and appealed to the aſſembly.

It may be remarked upon this whole procedure, 1ſt, With regard to the eraſements and interlineations of the extract on which it was founded, it is poſſible they might be immaterial, and it is as poſſible that the drummer might have made them through ignorance. Still, however, it was an informality; and, however agreeable it may be to the ſpirit of law and humanity to over-rule ſuch a plea in order to *ſave* a man, it is certainly contrary to both to over-rule it in order to *condemn* him. 2d, Thoſe who are not

acquainted with the nature of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution will be amazed at one circumſtance, viz. that the laſt meaſure ſhould paſs notwithſtanding that a majority of *miniſters* diſſented. Nothing happens more frequently in our courts. Every pariſh has a right to ſend an elder along with their miniſter to our provincial aſſemblies; theſe elders have an equal vote with the clergy; and as they muſt, from their education, be thoroughly tinctured with the popular notions, and conſequently, be entirely under their influence, the leaders of the orthodox party are at the greateſt pains, when they have a point to carry, to bring them along with them; and on every important occaſion, they are a never-failing engine in their hands, which they play off againſt the other faction. 3d, The powers granted to this committee are unhappily expreſſed. They are empowered to carry on the proſecution againſt Mr. Ferguſſon, and to bring the affair to an iſſue. The obvious meaning of this laſt clauſe, if we were to attend to the language, is, "to determine the affair *finally*,"

ly." This, however, is a power which is lodged in the General Aſſembly *only*. The Synod itſelf poſſeſſed it not, and, conſequently, could not delegate it to the committee.

The proſecution had been violently conducted, and was now arrived to its greateſt height. From this moment it began to decline, and this decline was chiefly owing to the very violence of thoſe meaſures which were employed to ſupport it. The committee was regarded with horror by all the ſenſible part of the nation; and every other judicatory, and every man, that could be of uſe to it, took meaſures to embarraſs its motions, and render its proceedings abortive.

In the mean time the high party drove on. The committee met. Elated with their ſucceſs, and eager to avail themſelves of it, they proceeded to inſtant action, and haſtened to depoſe Mr. Ferguſſon before any other court could interfere. In this career, the ſame diſregard to forms, the ſame violence of conduct, were diſplayed which had marked the

pro-

proceedings of the Synod. They appeared to have nothing but the *end* in view, and their minds were ſo occupied with this idea that no room ſeemed to have been left for the intermediate objects.

One circumſtance ſhews the amazing infatuation of that party at this time, and the zealous ſpirit by which they were actuated, in a ſtrong light. The Preſbytery of Irvine, who were parties with the drummer before the Synod, and a majority of the Synod itſelf, had lodged formal appeals againſt the very conſtitution of this committee. Till theſe appeals, therefore, could be determined by the aſſembly, nobody was obliged to acknowledge their juriſdiction, and the whole proceedings ſtood ſiſted. The aſſembly was to meet in a few months. Now even though the friends of the committee had viewed this concluſion in a different light, yet in a caſe which involved ſuch material conſequences, not only to the pannel, but the whole church, prudence itſelf, though juſtice and humanity had been out of the queſtion,

dictated

dictated a delay until the ſenſe of the ſupreme court upon this point could be obtained. Every conſideration was here againſt haſte; no one conſideration was for it. The committee, however, ſeemed to attend to nothing but the game before them. In the face of all theſe reaſons, which were loudly urged upon them from all quarters, they ſat down, found themſelves a court, proceeded to buſineſs, and ſeemed to tremble leſt the aſſembly ſhould meet before they had brought the affair to a concluſion.

The firſt ſtep they took, after conſtituting, was to diſmiſs James Maconnel as an improper proſecutor in ſuch a cauſe, and to take the affair into their own hands. After reading his libel, and praiſing him for his zeal and diligence, they excuſed his further attendance, and appointed a *ſub-committee* of five of their own members to draw up a new libel, and to lay it before them at their next meeting. This was directly approving the interlocutor of the Preſbytery of Irvine; and as that interlocutor,

terlocutor, with the conſequent appointments, were the only ſteps to which the Synod had not yet in one ſhape or other, given their ſanction, this was, in effect, reducing the reaſons of appeal on which their own conſtitution as a court was founded.

In the midſt of all this rigour, it is pleaſant to obſerve them endeavouring to preſerve the appearance of humanity. Having ordered the libel to be prepared without delay, they deſired their Moderator, in the mean time, to intimate this appointment to Mr. Ferguſſon by a letter, "leſt, they ſay, the preſent infirm and tender ſtate of his health might be hurt by the ſurprize of receiving the libel without any previous warning." Is it poſſible for a man here to reſtrain his indignation? Is it poſſible they could pretend ſo tender a concern for Mr. Ferguſſon at the very inſtant when they were endeavouring to ruin him? Or is it the humane religion of Jeſus which ſets a man's duty at variance with the ſentiments of his compaſſion?

compaſſion? In the courts of princes, a manœuvre of this nature is perfectly underſtood, and excites no ſurpriſe; but from the miniſters of *religion*,—let us ſhut our eyes, and ſuppoſe the whole a fiction.

At their next meeting, which was on November 14th, the new libel was preſented, and, with ſome corrections, approved of, and adopted by the committee. A copy of this, with a liſt of twenty witneſſes ſubjoined, and a ſummons to appear before them on the 29th of the ſame month, and anſwer to the charge preferred againſt him, was tranſmitted, by appointment of the committee, to Mr. Ferguſſon. In this requiſition, they did not ſo much as think it neceſſary to notify to him their powers to try him, and the ſummons itſelf was unſubſcribed by officer or witneſſes.

On the 29th of November, the day appointed for his trial, Mr. Ferguſſon appeared by his agent, who gave in the following letter to the committee.

"*Rev*ᵈ.

"*Revd. Sirs,*

I Have directed my agent to take a proteſt againſt the ſentence of the Synod, from which you claim your powers to proſecute me, and to appeal from that ſentence to the general aſſembly. This appeal of mine, with two other more formal appeals taken by the Preſbytery of Irvine, from the ſame ſentence, lay, I conceive, a regular ſiſt upon your procedure, according to the form of proceſs, chap. 5. ſect. 10. and till the merit of theſe appeals is decided by the ſupreme court of this church, to which you, as well as I, have promiſed ſubjection in the Lord, I cannot conſider you as my judges, but as my chriſtian brethren; and as ſuch I take the liberty to ſay a few words to you in the ſpirit of meekneſs.

You have expreſſed, in your firſt letter, ſome tenderneſs for my age and infirmities. I could have wiſhed you had ſhown ſome tenderneſs to my character, which I hope I have endeavoured to ſupport

through

through life ſuitable to my ſtation and office. But, inſtead of this, you have taken up a *fama* againſt me, without firſt enquiring into the riſe, occaſion, broachers, and grounds of it, as the church directs you, form of proceſs, chap. 7. at the end: and you have done all in your power to rouze the public indignation againſt me, and to fix public infamy upon me, as if I had vented dangerous hereſies, and committed groſs crimes. As it is poſſible many of you may have acted from a miſtaken ſenſe of duty, I can forgive you, and pray God it may not be laid to your charge. Yet I take this opportunity once for all to require you to deſiſt immediately, and take no farther ſteps in this affair. This I do, not for my own ſake, as I am equally above your pity and your reſentment, but for your ſakes, and for the ſake of the religion and cauſe of our common maſter, which lies bleeding under the wounds it has received from the diviſions and animoſities of chriſtians and chriſtian miniſters; and

has

has ſuffered more from the intemperate zeal and perſecuting ſpirit of its friends, than from all the attacks of heretics and infidels. Let it not, I beſeech you, ſuffer in this way from you! Leave the difficult work of rooting out the tares from among the wheat, to the great Maſter and Judge himſelf. He alone knows the hearts of men, and is properly qualified for this work. You are not. Behold the Judge ſtandeth at the door! He will ſoon decide between you and me, and render to each of us according to our works. Take care, then, leſt you provoke his ſeverity upon yourſelves, by any ſeverity or inhumanity to one of your fellow-ſervants.

I have ſaid this much to you as a chriſtian; and as a member of the church of Scotland let me ſay further, that I look upon myſelf as ſubject to my own Preſbytery in the firſt inſtance; whoſe ſummons and orders I am ready to obey, as ſoon as they are notified to me: but I cannot obey yours in the firſt inſtance without

without breaking my engagements to the church of Scotland, whoſe conſtitution I am bound to ſupport. — I therefore repeat my requiſition, that you deſiſt: and if you do not, you muſt excuſe me that I hereby decline your authority, and proteſt (by my agent,) that whatever you have done, or may do, againſt me, ſhall be void and null; and that you ſhall be anſwerable for any damage thereby done to my character, or property, as law will. I am,

Your moſt humble Servant,

ALEX. FERGUSSON."

After reading this, the agent proteſted, in terms of it, in the hands of the clerk of the committee, and of a notary public, and then withdrew.

This letter was certainly very ſtrong, ſince it had the effect to ſtagger the committee, and make them reſolve to conſider whether it was proper to proceed any farther or not. This conſideration they deferred till the next day.

Accordingly next day the committee did meet, and entered, for the firſt time, into a ſerious enquiry concerning their own powers, and the propriety of their proceeding farther. The chief objection which they ſaw againſt proceeding, and indeed it was by no means a contemptible one, was that, by diſmiſſing the drummer and his libel, it was become a new proceſs, and, therefore, ought to have begun at the Preſbytery. But this objection they found had been already, in effect, over-ruled by the Synod in that very ſentence from which they claimed their powers. This circumſtance, however, did not affect the objection itſelf. If any thing was proved by it, it was this,—that if the Synod had been guilty of an error, the committee was obliged to perſiſt in it. Upon this principle, therefore, the objection was repelled, and they reſolved to proceed. Proceed, then, they did; and, in order to repair the delay which had been occaſioned by this ſcruple, they found the libel relevant before they roſe, and nothing now remained but

to lead a proof againſt the pannel, and depoſe him.

It was now the committee began to be ſenſible of their ſituation. The chain which they had ſo violently wound up, in oppoſition to all the ſprings of form, reaſon, and moderation, ran down at once with a rapid motion, and left them in a ſtate of abſolute inefficacy. The greater part of the witneſſes whom they had occaſion to ſummon happened to live within the bounds of the Preſbytery of Irvine. This Preſbytery, who denied the juriſdiction of the committee, and conſidered it as an encroachment on their rights, and the conſtitution of the church of Scotland, iſſued an interdict prohibiting all the witneſſes reſiding within their bounds to appear before the committee, to furniſh them with any evidence in the cauſe, or to acknowledge their authority in any other way, till the mind of the ſupreme court ſhould be known. The reſt of the witneſſes, who were not within the bounds of that Preſbytery, laid im-

mediate hold on this pretext of the diſputed juriſdiction of the court, and likewiſe refuſed appearance. In ſhort, the proſecution, which had hitherto been carried on with ſuch rapidity, all at once ſtood ſtill. The court became thinner every ſubſequent diet. There was nothing before them but executions of ſummonſes, and letters of excuſes; the officer citing witneſſes pro ſecundo or tertio at the door, and the moderator naming their next meeting, and pronouncing them adjourned.

Deſpairing of receiving any lights from Irvine, they turned their eyes next towards the Preſbytery of Edinburgh. Three of the witneſſes lived within the bounds of that Preſbytery, and the moderator of the committee wrote to the moderator of the Preſbytery deſiring that Preſbytery to cite and examine theſe witneſſes, and ſending them a liſt of queries. Here the committee were guilty of the ſame informality as when they wrote to Mr. Ferguſſon. They ſent no extract of their powers. The Preſbytery

of

of Edinburgh, therefore, after reaſoning upon the affair, were unanimouſly of opinion, "that they could not take under conſideration the requiſition of the committee, becauſe they had no proper evidence before them of the conſtitution and powers of that court," and appointed this to be intimated to the committee.

The committee, in the next ſtep which they took, ſeem to have thrown off the very appearance of candour. In the return which they made to the Preſbytery of Edinburgh, inſtead of ſending the record of the Synod, which contained their conſtitution and powers, *entire*, they ſent only that ſingle clauſe of it by which they were conſtituted a court. Suppoſing the committee to have been convinced of the weakneſs of their foundation, there was, indeed, a reaſon for being ſparing in their extract on this occaſion. That record, together with the clauſe which conſtituted them into a committee, contained in the very boſom of it, the confeſſion of the drummer concerning the vitiated extract,

which rendered all ſubſequent proceedings upon it void and null. It contained alſo the Preſbytery's appeal, which ſuſpended the whole cauſe by ſiſting both Synod and Preſbytery before the ſupreme court. For the committee, therefore, to ſend this to the Preſbytery of Edinburgh, was to ſend the ſtrongeſt poſſible evidence againſt themſelves; and as, in fact, they did not ſend it, it affords a preſumption that they were conſcious of this. What is ſtill ſtranger, the committee muſt have known that it was neceſſary to ſend this in order to enable the Preſbytery of Edinburgh to judge of the very point concerning which they wanted information. It is certain that the Preſbytery of Irvine conſidered this as an artifice. It was an artifice too of which they did not believe even this committee capable. So far from ſuſpecting them of ſuch a ſtroke, in the letters and remonſtrances which they ſent to the Preſbytery of Edinburgh, they appealed, in the ſimplicity of their hearts, to the extract of the Synod's procedure which had

had been ſent to that Preſbytery by the committee, as if it had been fully and faithfully laid before them.—The reſult of the whole was, that the Preſbytery of Edinburgh refuſed to examine the witneſſes, or to take any part in the affair.

The committee was now reduced to an abſolute incapacity of acting. They found themſelves in that ſituation in *fact*, in which from the beginning they had been in *law*. Finding it vain, therefore, to attempt to proceed farther, they met, on the 31ſt of January, for the laſt time, in order to take the only ſtep which was now left them, and to diſſolve themſelves. After the expence of ſo much labour and intrigue, after violating ſo many forms of juſtice, and exhauſting ſo much zeal, in order to get the affair into their own hands; the proſpect of being forced to relinquiſh it in this manner, when they had brought their ſcheme to bear, and thought their prey ſure, muſt have been doubly diſtreſſing. Before their diſſolu-

tion, however, another farce was acted, which equalled in grimace any of the former, and enabled them to quit the ſtage in character.

One of the moſt material witneſſes in the cauſe was the Reverend Mr. John Adam, miniſter in Weſt Kilbride. This was the Gentleman to whom Mr. Ferguſſon had addreſſed the letter which was the foundation of the proſecution, and Mr. Adam was ſtill in poſſeſſion of the original. He was, therefore, a capital evidence, and had accordingly been ſummoned among the other witneſſes. He had, from the beginning, affected not to appear in any part of the cauſe; from motives, as he ſaid, of delicacy, and leſt, as he was the perſon injured, the world ſhould impute it to private reſentment. Being cited by this ſame committee as an evidence, he had, not long before, wrote them a letter excuſing himſelf from appearing for the above reaſons, and likewiſe on account of the Preſbytery of Irvine's interdict, of which Preſbytery he

was a member. This deportment was exceedingly amiable, and had gained Mr. Adam great applauſe. It was thought the more diſintereſted, as Mr. Adam had all along profeſſed that he had ſome ſcruples, from duty, concerning the part which his ſituation now forced him to act, and that he was afraid it was culpable in him to refuſe to appear in the cauſe of God from perſonal conſiderations. His conduct, therefore, on this occaſion was really noble, and we were not averſe to believe it genuine. In fact, while there appeared any probability that Mr. Ferguſſon could be depoſed without his evidence, Mr. Adam had adhered to his reſolution invariably; and this appearance had been ſo long ſupported, that our attention was entirely diverted from that quarter. On the laſt day of the committee, however, when they were now deliberating concerning their own diſſolution, and had deſpaired of being able to obtain any farther light into the affair, who ſhould make his appearance in court but

Mr,

Mr. Adam? An apparition ſo unexpected could not fail to draw attention; and, being one of the witneſſes whom they had formerly ſummoned to no purpoſe, it naturally occurred to every body that he had at laſt obeyed the committee's requiſition, and was come up in conſequence of his ſummons. Upon being called to the bar, however, and interrogated upon this point, he denied that this was the motive of his coming to town at that time. He affirmed that he had come upon buſineſs of his own which had no relation to theirs, and that his ſtumbling in upon them, at this juncture, was merely accidental. The committee, ſagacious to improve accidents, and determined to let ſlip no occaſion of advancing the proſecution, in however ſmall a degree, reſolved to ſeize upon this opportunity of doing buſineſs, and of convincing the world, if any thing more was neceſſary to convince them, that it was not their fault matters were not farther advanced. They told him, therefore, that,

that, now he was come, he muſt ſubmit to an examination. Mr. Adam, upon this, teſtified the greateſt reluctance, mentioned his having all along declined to appear in the cauſe, begged they would conſider the particular circumſtances of his caſe, and perſiſted in aſſuring them that he had come to town without any ſuch intention. The committee, however, ſince he was there, reſolved to proceed; yet as his coming was accidental, they were alarmed leſt he ſhould have forgot the original letter, which was of chief conſequence. But here, by a ſtrange concurrence of accidents, he told them he had likewiſe put this very letter into his pocket that morning, but begged they would not oblige him to produce it. He urged again the delicacy of his own ſituation, and the wicked conſtruction that would be put upon his conduct by the world if they ſhould perſiſt in forcing him to give evidence againſt his will. He ſaid people might ſuſpect that he had come up with an intention to do it, which

he

he assured them again he had not: he added, that he held himself excused by a letter he had received from the committee, that his appearance in that cause was improper on many accounts, and begged hard to be off. The committee, with great gravity, answered, that this delicacy, which was amiable in *him*, would be criminal in *them*; that the cause could not be supported without his evidence, and, therefore, they were under a necessity to take it. Mr. Adam, who is open to conviction, was at last reasoned into the measure, though he still went into it with reluctance. However, as he had not been regularly summoned, having come in accidentally, as has been related, it was necessary to give him another summons. This protracted the court another day, in the interval to which Mr. Adam did not attempt to make his escape. The taking his evidence was the last act of the committee.

This scene suggests many reflections, if it were necessary to make them; but the

the ſtep which the committee took with regard to it is equal to a thouſand commentaries. They ordered their clerk, when he gave extracts of their minutes, not to give an extract of what paſſed at this laſt meeting. Accordingly when Mr. Ferguſſon got an extract from them, it did not contain this laſt meeting.—After appointing their moderator to lay a full account of their proceedings before the next Synod, they diſſolved themſelves.

Thus lived, and thus died this abortive committee. The hiſtory of its proceedings, written by a man poſſeſſed of true talents for the ludicrous, would do more than divert the public. It might inſtruct them. It would be neceſſary, however, that its hiſtorian ſhould poſſeſs one negative qualification. He muſt not be ſubject to too lively an indignation againſt vice. In that caſe, he would be in perpetual danger of paſſing from the *ludicrous* to the *ſevere*, and the public might think him *intereſted*.

The eyes of all men were directed towards

wards the enſuing Synod, which was appointed to meet at Ayr. An effort was made by the Preſbytery of Irvine and the committee to bring up their friends on both ſides. In conſequence of this, there was a more numerous meeting than had ever been ſeen in that quarter. The two parties were nearly balanced. By a debate about nothing, which frequently happens in church courts, and a vote upon a point too inſignificant to be here mentioned, they tried one another's ſtrength, and the committee and their friends were found wanting. In conſequence of this, propoſals were at laſt made by the minority for ending the affair in an amicable manner, to which the other party were not averſe. For this purpoſe a ſelect committee was appointed, conſiſting of the leaders on both ſides; who were to deliberate on the ſubject, and propoſe whatever meaſure ſhould appear to them expedient. At laſt an overture was agreed upon, which was afterwards adopted by the whole Synod, and which was calcu-

lated

lated to anſwer, in ſome meaſure, the views of both parties. The Synod expreſſed their deteſtation againſt every thing contrary to the eſtabliſhed doctrine of the church, which they had all engaged to ſupport, and againſt falſehood and diſingenuity: they expreſſed alſo their diſapprobation of the publication of a certain letter ſigned A. B. as having given occaſion to reports injurious to the Synod in theſe reſpects; and they remitted the whole cauſe relating to Mr. Ferguſſon of Kilwinning to the Preſbytery of Irvine, with full powers to take ſuch meaſures as ſhould appear to them moſt for edification.

One remark may be made here upon the firſt part of this overture. The Synod expreſſed their deteſtation againſt every thing contrary to the eſtabliſhed doctrine of the church. This was, in other words, declaring it as the opinion of the court that every thing contrary to the eſtabliſhed doctrine of this church is the object of deteſtation. A doctrine dic-

tated

tated in the very ſpirit and ſtile of eſtabliſhment! What pity it is that men of liberal ſentiments ſhould be laid under the cruel neceſſity of affording the ſhelter of their ſilence to ſuch a ſentiment! Was there not one in this numerous aſſembly, convocated in the year 1769, in the ſunſhine of the ſciences, bold enough to propoſe an amendment, and to ſubſtitute ſome chriſtian term in the room of deteſtation? Admitting that every member of this Synod believed every doctrine eſtabliſhed in this church, was it incumbent on them to deteſt every opinion which was contrary? At the very inſtant when they diſcourage perſecution, muſt they approve the principle from which it proceeds, and give the ſanction of their example to the horrid ſentiment of religious deteſtation? They order away the ſtake, and confirm the rancour which planted it.

I ſhall make a ſingle obſervation more upon another part of their ſentence, with the ſame view. They expreſs their diſapprobation

probation of the *publication* of the letter ſigned A. B. But why did they not diſapprove the letter itſelf? It was innocent. Then why not publiſh it? Ye impoſers of confeſſions! we owe this to you. You have disjoined our ſentiments from our words, and ſet our prudence and ſincerity at variance.

The cauſe, being remitted to the proper court, was now managed with decency, and ſoon brought to a concluſion. The Preſbytery of Irvine began where they had been interrupted, by renewing the appointment of their committee; who, having converſed with Mr. Ferguſſon, found that it never was his intention, in any thing he had publiſhed, to deny the ſcripture doctrine of the ſatisfaction of Chriſt, or encourage diſingenuity in ſubſcription. Upon which the Preſbytery, believing their brother to be ſincere in the above declaration, diſmiſſed the whole affair, judging this iſſue of it to be moſt for edification. In this ſentence they were perfectly unanimous. When it was reported to the next Synod,

the members of the old committee ſeemed willing to find fault with the conduct of the Preſbytery, and to reſume the affair into their own hands. But, the laſt Synod having unanimouſly given unlimited powers to the Preſbytery, they were obliged, in decency, to acquieſce. And the report was engroſſed in their minutes.

Such was the iſſue of this formidable proceſs. A proceſs which was begun, and forced into our church courts by a party who glory in an uniform oppoſition to moderation. At firſt popular, it roſe to an alarming height; and was afterwards precipitated into ruin chiefly by the zeal of its ſupporters. The odium, for ſome time, ran high againſt Mr. Ferguſſon. Every voice was exalted, and thoſe who could not diſapprove of his opinions, blamed his imprudence. The whole trial affords a memorable example of the ſpirit of eſtabliſhment ſtruggling with the ſentiments of the age. Some circumſtances were favourable for Mr. Ferguſſon.

His honeſt character, his age and infirmities, his numerous connections among the clergy, above all, his uncommon generoſity in giving away his whole ſtipend to young men of merit whom he employed as his aſſiſtants, were powerful advocates in his favour; and, aſſiſted by the abſurd violence of his enemies, enabled him to withſtand the aſſault, and at laſt to repel it. Perhaps there were few miniſters in our church, beſides himſelf, who could have ſuſtained it. Even *he* could boaſt of no victory. After exhauſting his whole ſtrength, he was obliged, as the condition of his peace, to join his enemies upon the ground of the conſtitution. With all our lights, his friends deſpaired of ſaving him but by refuſing the charge. Our church knows as yet no other means of repelling a hereſy proceſs.

Some may, indeed, think that he gained one advantage. In his conference with the committee, he declared that it never was his intention, in any thing he had publiſhed to deny the ſatisfaction of

Chriſt, but always to adhere to the *ſcripture* doctrine on that point; and this declaration was admitted by the church as ſatisfactory. Here, it may be ſaid, the ſcriptures are reſorted to as the ſtandard of faith, without the medium of the confeſſion. But, at moſt, this is ambiguous, and too looſe to ſerve for a precedent. It is evident in what ſenſe the one party muſt have underſtood this declaration, and it was prudent in the other party to leave it unexplained. Something in our conſtitution itſelf is wrong, or not properly defined. The tempeſt is now overblown, and we may examine the affair at leiſure.

The defenders of orthodoxy, that is to ſay, the writers in the Scots Magazine, are not to be conſidered as private eſſayiſts. They have proceeded upon the principles on which our conſtitutionaliſts have always proceeded, and on which they proceeded in this inſtance. The *manner* in which thoſe have reaſoned has been actually reduced into practice by ſub-

ſequent Synods and committees. When I attempt, therefore, to expoſe, and refute theſe writers, I anſwer their whole party. This is the light in which the public will pleaſe to view this debate. The man muſt have much time lying on his hands who would draw his pen againſt every fugitive ſubject which makes its appearance in a periodical publication. The preſent is not one of theſe. It is a general debate, it is an intereſting one. As ſuch, I have reſcued it from the Magazine, and preſented it to the Public.

Our church is moſt certainly at this day, and has for ſome time been, in a very odd ſituation. Our inſtitutions and our opinions, conſequently our thoughts and our actions, even our conſciences and our duty have been long at variance. How long will theſe things be overlooked? Every new hereſy proceſs, and, if the preſent ſpirit receive not ſome effectual check, we are likely to have them ſoon in great plenty, ought to alarm our attention, and prompt us to examine,

with more care, our religious conſtitution, and the defects of it.

Let it be noticed particularly, that all the arguments employed in the following performance againſt the *manner* in which the *writers* of the party have proceeded, lie equally ſtrong againſt the *method* of procedure which at preſent prevails in our eccleſiaſtical judicatories.

My principal deſign is to demonſtrate and enforce, from a view of the preſent actual ſituation of the church of Scotland, and from a view of the preſent caſe in particular, the neceſſity of an immediate, and farther reformation.

Some important articles in our religious conſtitution itſelf are alſo attempted to be explained. But I muſt not anticipate. In our preſent ſituation, and until a reformation can take place, every friend of religious liberty will regard the eſtabliſhing theſe articles as a matter of the very laſt conſequence.

That has happened to this work which, I believe, happens to moſt. The execu-

tion

tion is larger than the original plan. The whole deſign was originally comprehended in the firſt part. But my attention having been imperceptibly turned towards the point of ſubſcription, and the arguments which had been advanced by both parties on that head; I thought it requiſite to enlarge my firſt foundation, and to add a ſecond part. I ſubjoined a third, becauſe I found that my ideas were not exhauſted. Still I fear the public will think that I have not done juſtice to the ſubject. I am but too ſenſible of it myſelf, and confeſs that, after all my labour, the work comes not up to my own ſentiments. Many inaccuracies will, no doubt, be obſerved. It was written in ſeparate pieces, at different times, and the plan was more than once altered. Perhaps were I to model it anew, I might render it leſs unworthy of attention. But for this I have neither leiſure nor patience. The truth is, the fate of the performance affects me but little. Let it

draw the attention of the public upon the ſubject, and periſh.

I have but a few things more to add. We haſten to the ſpeculative part of the debate. A circumſtance or two more will finiſh the hiſtorical.

Mr. Fergusſon, the original occaſion of this diſpute, is now no more. He is beyond the reach of his enemies. He died as he lived,—honeſt and open, a friend to truth, and a determined enemy to hypocrites. He has now received his ſentence. His upright ſpirit is happy. While he reſided on earth, he was above diſſimulation; and that expoſed him to the attacks of craftineſs. He is now exalted to his place, and looks down, with pity, on our miſerable politics. Magnanimous ſpirit! I am looking for thy fellow. Tell me, ye zealous for the Lord! do you think that, when Mr. Fergusſon appeared in Heaven, his creator aſked him whether he was a Socinian or a Calviniſt?

But I have to addreſs his proſecutors upon another ſubject. It may, perhaps,

touch

touch them, becauſe their feelings are intereſted. You, then, who were cruel enough to puſh him as he ſtood tottering upon the brink of the grave! ſuffer yourſelves now to reflect. Are you not now happy that your vengeance was diſappointed? Had you ſucceeded in your attempts, could your minds have been eaſy at this moment? Is it not better that he baffled your deſigns, than that you ſhould now be feeling the tormenting ſuſpicion that you had haſtened an old man's death by the rigour of your meaſures? The pang of diſſolution is not more dreadful than a thought like this, and yet, in that event, it muſt inceſſantly have purſued you. Give thanks to God, you have once eſcaped the danger, and let it ſtand a terrible guardian to your future humanity. A devoted attachment to your own opinions may be a duty, but there are other duties to which you are alſo bound. Humanity, my brethren! is the firſt duty of a man, and it is the character of a chriſtian to be more compaſſionate than zealous.

zealous. What is human nature diveſted of kindneſs? Or what is religion when it makes us barbarous? I have to inform you of more. Mr. Fergusſon died your friend. He had your reformation ſtill in view, and deſpaired not to effect it. Some time before his death, the following performance fell into his hands. He was pleaſed to approve it. It met the ſenſe of his own noble ſpirit; and, with his dying breath, he demanded that it ſhould be publiſhed. You may regard it as coming from *him*. He has left it as a legacy to the orthodox.

There is one thing more which it is neceſſary to obſerve. In the following argument I have proceeded upon the ſuppoſition that Mr. Fergusſon is actually chargeable with having advanced all the opinions which the writers of the party ſay he has advanced. In juſtice, however, to the hiſtory, and to prevent miſtakes, I think it incumbent upon me here to declare, that this is only for the ſake of

argument.

argument. The public are already appriſed that, after all the clamour which has been raiſed, and all the abuſe with which a virulent party have beſpattered him, a *choſen* committee, with their *whole* induſtry, were able to find only two articles from that letter on which they could, with any appearance of reaſon, raiſe a libel againſt Mr. Ferguſſon. I have reſerved the conſideration of the libel till now. No circumſtance ſets the ſpirit diſcovered by the party on this occaſion in a ſtronger light than this. After all their noiſe, the articles with which they have charged him are ſo light in themſelves, and expreſſed with ſuch manifeſt heſitation, that, conſidering the conſequences which a hereſy proceſs involves, it is almoſt aſtoniſhing how any court could give them a patient hearing. The firſt article is, "that the words he has uſed, in one part of his letter, *tend* to promote an opinion contrary to that great and capital doctrine of the goſpel, that Chriſt

ſuffered

ſuffered in the ſtead of ſinners, and bore the puniſhment due to them." The ſecond is, "that he has advanced principles, *tending* to encourage diſingenuity in ſubſcription." — Here one cannot help obſerving with what fear and trembling the reverend committee have expreſſed themſelves on this occaſion. Indeed they ſeem conſcious that they are not treading upon firm ground. They do not charge him with having denied the doctrine of the Satisfaction, nor with having advanced principles which encourage diſingenuity, but with having advanced ſome things *tending* to theſe purpoſes. How ſlender a foundation for a fabric of ſuch weight! Was this a ſufficient reaſon to blacken the character of a miniſter of Chriſt, and repreſent him as a heretic and a villain? I enquire not here into the truth of the charge itſelf. That is of ſmall moment in the general argument, and has beſides already been judicially determined. I would only mark the temper of the

times.

times. I would let the public ſee with what light materials we can work up a hereſy proceſs in this kingdom, and from what a ſmall ſpark proceeded ſo mighty a flame.

But if, from the ſame ſpark, ſhould proceed that ſacred fire which animated our firſt reformers; if it ſhould, in the ſecret counſels of providence, be deſtined to awaken that ſpirit of enquiry ſo fatal to eſtabliſhment; and inſpire us with the reſolution of breaking thoſe ignominious bonds which are at once our diſgrace and the puniſhment of our inactivity; what mighty obligations will the church of Scotland owe to Mr. Fergusſon? The debate is now begun;—you who profeſs yourſelves the enemies of eccleſiaſtical tyranny! it is incumbent on *you* to maintain it. The ſubject has not yet been diſcuſſed in this kingdom, yet a previous diſcuſſion is neceſſary. The minds of men muſt be prepared; oppoſition muſt be ſilenced. After theſe ſteps, the republican

lican clergymen of Scotland, who have not to cut their way through the blood and entrails of *Biſhops*, will aſſert their rights. We will ſet the example of religious liberty to England.

CHRISTIANUS.

THE
Religious Eſtabliſhment
IN
SCOTLAND
EXAMINED, &c.

PART I.

OUR attention has been, for ſome time, directed upon a moſt important cauſe. Our religious parties, an event long foreſeen, and which might have been with certainty predicted, have at length commenced hoſtilities. The ſubject of the preſent debate, from being at firſt perſonal, is now become general. From an affair between Mr. A. B. and his

his brother, it has been inſenſibly converted into a defence of the doctrine and diſcipline of the church of Scotland. In this light we ſhall conſider it here. The attempts which have been made to defend our church ſuppoſe that ſuch a defence is neceſſary. But, though no ſuch attempts had been made, the ſtate of our religious affairs conſidered in themſelves; more particularly the manner in which our church-men have proceeded againſt Mr. Ferguſſon; are proofs that this ſubject is ripe for a diſcuſſion. It has been already debated, and in warm terms, through the channel of the Scots Magazine. But the debate was left imperfect. The advocates of religious liberty, the defenders of eſtabliſhment themſelves, if they are honeſt in their profeſſions, will think the ſubject too momentous to be ſuffered to remain in the ſtate in which it lies there. I ſhall here, therefore, take up the argument where theſe writers have left it; I ſhall begin where they end; and endeavour to ſtate this whole cauſe

upon

upon Proteſtant principles, and in its proper point of view.

The preciſe point to which this debate is arrived, and from which, to avoid repetition, I propoſe to ſet out, appears to me to be this: "Whether all the articles to which the church of Scotland requires ſo poſitive a ſubſcription from her office-bearers are really agreeable to the word of God?" The Gentlemen who wrote upon the ſubject in the Magazines for * January and March have, in effect, confeſſed that the diſpute muſt be finally reſolved into this ſtate, by their giving in ſo formal a defence of her doctrine and diſcipline. For they were ſenſible that if theſe articles are in themſelves indefenſible, if they are repugnant to the ſcriptures, and to human reaſon; all the arts of ſophiſtry would never be able to fix the imputation of diſhoneſty upon Mr. A. B. for having, in oppoſition to ſuch a torrent of prejudice, and clamour, let me add in oppoſition to his own intereſt, made ſo ingenuous an acknowledgment.

* See the Scots Magazines for January and March 1768.

On the contrary, his conduct muſt, upon ſuch a ſuppoſition, have been noble and diſintereſted. It muſt be regarded with gratitude by every friend of truth and chriſtian liberty, as a great attempt to break the fetters of eccleſiaſtical tyranny, and to aſſert the genuine doctrines of chriſtianity from the invaſions of ſuperſtition and ignorance. Again, on the other hand, ſuppoſing theſe articles to give the true ſenſe of the ſcriptures, thoſe who *aſſent* this cannot ſurely think that truth will ſuffer by *any* examination. If there is any brother who has ſcruples upon any point, it is certainly the duty of chriſtian charity, previous to all things, to endeavour his *conviction*; and a candid examination of thoſe tenets the truth of which he is ſuppoſed to doubt, is ſurely the proper way to effect this. I ſee not the leaſt room in this caſe for perſonal reflections. As we Proteſtants acknowledge no Infallible guide, the ſubject is evidently problematical. It ought, therefore, to be reſolved with temper. It muſt appear ſtrange conduct in any man if, inſtead of

ſatisfying

ſatisfying my ſcruples upon points of ſuch a nature, he ſhould take fire, and abuſe me. "Are theſe articles the truths of God or not?" This is the proper ſtate of the queſtion. It is alſo the only enquiry from which any good can be expected. Let the parties, therefore, meet in this field. I ſay the ſame thing to Mr. A. B. Let us deliberate together like brethren, and like chriſtians, and let us confine ourſelves to the proper ſubject. Let us alſo deliberate with the attention which is due to a ſubject of ſuch importance; and let us beſeech God, in whoſe hands are the beginnings of reformation, to direct our enquiries towards truth, and to detect error, on whatever ſide it may lurk, and in whatever form.

I propoſe not, in this place, to examine the articles ſeverally and particularly of which our confeſſion is compoſed. My deſign at preſent is only this — to direct the attention of the diſputants, who in the heat of the debate, may not perhaps ſo ſoon obſerve it, to that point where the ſtreſs of the action muſt at laſt lie;

and to add a few general obſervations which may ſerve as principles to proceed upon in the introduction to a debate which is becoming more and more general, at this day, through the three kingdoms.

Firſt of all, then, — Why ſhould I be afraid to ſpeak my mind, and to repreſent the general ſenſe of, to ſay the leaſt, a very conſiderable diviſion of the ſenſible part of the nation? It ſeems to be acknowledged by one party, at leaſt it is grievouſly ſuſpected by the other, that there has been, for a long time, a tacit, and very general defection from theſe articles. In God's name if we want to diſpute at all about it, let us ſeriouſly ſet ourſelves to find out the reaſon of this. The party alledged to be infected with hereſy is by no means confined to the young and unexperienced, whoſe opinions have been perverted by the reading of ſuperficial, modern productions. The orthodox cannot, without incurring the charge of an exceſſive vanity and ſelf-ſufficiency, deny that many, very many whom they ſuſpect of wrong principles, are equal to

themſelves in years, in experience, in genius, and in learning. I ſhould be ſorry if they would not alſo allow that they are equal to them in virtue and honeſty; or that they ſhould aſſume ſo far as to ſay to every brother who has the misfortune to differ from *them*,—"Stand by, for I am holier than thou." This being the caſe, it affords a very ſtrong ſuſpicion that the ſource of this defection lies in the articles themſelves. Let theſe articles, therefore, be impartially *reviewed*; and, if errors be diſcovered, let us not be aſhamed to *reform*. The orthodox party can have no objection to ſuch a ſcrutiny. It is a maxim with them that peace muſt be ſacrificed to truth. Come, then, my zealous brethren! ſince peace is out of the queſtion, let us ſearch after the truth, and that only. And that we may omit no means to diſcover it, let us begin at the foundation. But break not the peace until you have found the truth; at leaſt ſuſpend hoſtilities until the previous ſearch has been made, until you know whether the war you undertake be juſt or not. This

is ſurely a more chriſtian method of proceeding than the raiſing at once a clamour of hereſy and perjury againſt every man who has the honeſty to declare his real ſentiments.

To come more particularly to the preſent point. People who are acquainted with human nature, and with the hiſtory of mankind, are apt to be anxiouſly on their guard againſt impoſitions in matters of religion. No ſet of men whatever are infallible. The aſſembly of divines, who compoſed our confeſſion, expreſly, and on their own part, diſclaim infallibility. This is another preſumption that the ſource of error lies in the articles. It affords at leaſt a poſſibility that theſe articles are erroneous in ſome reſpect or other. Now, even upon the foundation of this poſſibility, it is a much more charitable way of proceeding to examine, with temper, if this is the *fact*, than, without a ſingle hearing of the cauſe, to emit rigorous cenſures againſt thoſe who poſitively aſſert it to be the fact.

But

But mere poſſibilities are nothing. I venture to aſſert upon the ſureſt principles of reaſoning, if reaſoning has any ſuch thing as principles, that there is the higheſt moral probability that this is the fact. I will deduce this probability from a few very plain connections, and I ſubmit this deduction to any ſcrutiny. It will be granted by all parties that ignorance is different from knowledge. It will be granted that we have diſtinct ideas of each. It will be confeſſed that the world, this part of it at leaſt, has experienced both ſtates. It will be acknowledged that chriſtianity has ſubſiſted in both. It will alſo be acknowledged that the ſyſtem of chriſtianity, as well as every other inſtitution, is liable to be affected in paſſing through theſe ſtates. It will be granted that it is liable, as liable as any other ſcience, to be better or worſe underſtood according to the different abilities of its profeſſors. It may be altered, miſrepreſented, and purified from miſrepreſentation. Now I aſk, when is this ſyſtem, or any other ſcience, likely to be beſt underſtood? Is

it in an age of darkneſs, of ignorance, and barbarity? Or is it in an age of light, of knowledge, and humanity? Will any man ſay that it is in the former of theſe periods? I ſpeak not to fanatics, but to men who are willing to abide by what is reaſonable.

Conſult hiſtory. When was it that the ſyſtem of chriſtianity was corrupted? I think it was chiefly between the fifth and twelfth centuries. It is well known that this was a period of the moſt deplorable ignorance which ever overſpread the world. In the beginning of the ſixteenth century the ſciences revived, and the day of knowledge began again to dawn. And was not this the æra of the reformation? To what was this reformation owing? Was it not to this circumſtance, that the ſcriptures began at that time to be better underſtood? And to what again was this owing? Surely to the ſuperior lights, and greater ſtock of knowledge which mankind then poſſeſſed. Theſe ſteps follow one another as regularly as the revolution

of the ſeaſons, and the ſucceſſion of day and night.

Now, fix your attention for a moment upon the reformation itſelf. Will you, will any ſenſible man ſay, that it was complete? Or that, in the nature of things, it could be completed all at once? Believe me the tranſition from ignorance to knowledge, from ſuperſtition to reaſon, is not ſo inſtantaneous. The reformers themſelves had their prejudices. Theſe prejudices could not be removed ſpeedily, and we have no reaſon to think they were removed miraculouſly. They were educated in the communion of the church of Rome. They had imbibed her doctrines, and method of treating them. Thoſe of them who were poſſeſſed of learning were deeply tinctured with the opinions of the later fathers. Luther, in particular, took the leading articles of his ſpeculative ſyſtem from St. Auguſtine. He was a moſt paſſionate admirer of that father. It is from the writings of this ſame ſaint, however, that the church of Rome pretends to juſtify a great part of her tenets.

He

He is to this day her favourite author. Lay all theſe circumſtances together. Add to theſe the effects which the enthuſiaſm of reformation, and the animoſity of religious controverſy muſt have produced on their diſcourſes and writings. Remember, at the ſame time, that the ſucceſſors of theſe firſt reformers, the Synod of Dort, the aſſembly of divines at Weſtminſter, and all the members of eſtabliſhment who had any hand in compoſing thoſe teſts and ſtandards of orthodoxy which have come down to us, had the moſt ſuperſtitious reverence for their opinions, did little elſe but copy their ideas, and thought that every ſyſtem of ſpeculative, religious principles was juſt ſo far removed from truth as it departed from theſe ſacred originals. Reflect, too, upon the unavoidable collateral influence which muſt, in ſome degree, have infected our ſtandards, proceeding from the numerous, wild, and fanatical ſects which ſprang up along with them. I leave every man to ſtate the mediums in his own way. But the concluſions from the whole are

ſurely

ſurely theſe,—that there is the higheſt probability that ſomething is ſtill left to reform: that we have the ſame *right*, nay we have the ſame calls from duty and conſcience, to review received opinions, even though they ſhould be found in our ſtandards, as our fathers had, and to reject them if they are diſcovered to be erroneous: and that, finally, the religious ſentiments of the preſent age have the ſame kind of advantage over the religious ſentiments of the reformers, that the ſentiments of theſe laſt had over the ſentiments of *their* fathers. This age is ſuperior to the age of the reformation; our ſentiments may be preſumed juſter, and more correct than theirs; for the ſame reaſon, and in the ſame proportion to the comparative difference of circumſtances, that the period of the reformation was ſuperior to the tenth century. Words may be multiplied without end on any ſubject; but, in ſome caſes, the reaſon of the thing is more evident in itſelf than it can be made by any illuſtrations.

This leads ſtill a ſtep farther. From obſervations like theſe many have been led to condemn all religious ſubſcriptions in general. They conclude them to be unwarrantable in themſelves, unſcriptural, and which no ſociety has a right to exact. In ſupport of this opinion, they add to the foregoing reaſonings the evil conſequences which ſuch eſtabliſhments have been attended with in all ages. I have ſtill an eye on the proper field of controverſy to which this diſpute has imperceptibly led the contending parties.

In the firſt place, They are ſo many bars in the way of all improvement, ſo far as they relate to the articles which they ſpecify.

2*dly*, They afford temptations to inſincerity, which, in an enlightened age, are generally irreſiſtible.

3*dly*, They reduce the temporal emoluments of religion, a circumſtance which even the orthodox were never known wholly to overlook; they reduce theſe, I ſay, to a perfect monopoly.

4*thly*,

4thly, Their original impoſers might poſſibly think that they would be of uſe to promote uniformity in opinion. Now, allowing this to be an advantage to the cauſe of religion in the world, they are found, by experience, to fail of this end moſt egregiouſly, if not to produce the quite contrary effect. The preſent diſpute is an inſtance of the natural tendency which they have to contention.

5thly, They have, in many inſtances, been found to furniſh hypocriſy and bigotry with fatal arms againſt truth and ſincerity. Behind this ſhelter men of the worſt principles may lie, and clamour with impunity, at leaſt with every popular advantage on their ſide, againſt men of the very beſt.

6thly, When they have once eſtabliſhed themſelves in a country, and gained the protection of the laws, let their articles be ever ſo abſurd, they never can be removed afterwards, even when this abſurdity is diſplayed in the face of the ſun, without exciting the moſt violent commotions, and producing the moſt deſtructive

tive conſequences to the human ſpecies. Witneſs the hiſtory of the reformation over all Europe.

Additional to theſe, and many other bad conſequences which might be enumerated, they obſerve that this practice has no foundation in ſcripture. On the contrary, it ſeems to be oppoſite to the whole ſpirit of the chriſtian religion as it is delivered in the New Teſtament.

And it is not more oppoſite to the genius of chriſtianity than it is to the principles of reaſon. What *right* had men like ourſelves, who lived perhaps a thouſand years ago, to bind *us* to *their* opinions? What madneſs to attempt it? It is ſaid they do not bind us;—they leave us at liberty. But they do, and under a very ſevere penalty too;—no leſs than the being deprived of the whole temporal emoluments of eſtabliſhment.

But no conſideration would weigh more againſt ſubſcriptions with me than the high probability, which experience teaches us there is, that religious opinions can never, in *fact*, be long fixed

to

to any human ſtandard whatever, much leſs be ever fixed to any juſt ſtandard. From the beginning of time this ſubject has been in a ſtate of fluctuation. The element of water has been bound in chains of ice, and aſſumed, for a moment, an uniform appearance. But the ſun ſoon diſſolved the charm, and releaſed the waves, ſeemingly huſhed to final repoſe, from their temporary confinement. So has it fared with every attempt to bind the opinions of mankind. They are unſtable as the moſt fluid element. They eſcape even the chains of ſubſcription. Some, however, would be willing to overlook even this inconvenience, if human ſagacity could ever hope to attain *truth* in this ſubject. But neither can this be done. I own, at the ſame time, that I have no reaſon for ſaying that it *cannot* be done, but becauſe it never *has* been done.

Let a Preſbyterian examine all the confeſſions which at this day exiſt, his own excepted. He will readily acknowledge that none of them exhibits the ſenſe of

ſcripture

ſcripture faithfully. He may proceed a ſtep farther, and join his own to the catalogue.

You who are advocates for ſubſcription! pray tell us, if you wanted to exhibit a faithful liſt of religious articles, a liſt which would give the ſenſe of ſcripture with the greateſt exactneſs, at what period of the church would you chooſe to collect it? I ſuppoſe *truth* to be your ſole aim, as you profeſs it is. Name the opinions of any period, to within a century of the apoſtles, and I will engage to find errors among theſe opinions; and ſuch errors as muſt have made their way into any confeſſion which could have been compiled in that period.

If ever there was a period when our religion might be expected to have been pure, it certainly was in the three firſt centuries. The church was then in a manner new from the hands of the apoſtles; the pruriency of private imagination was chaſtiſed by the fire of perſecution; the obſcurity of the whole body afforded few temptations to that ambition which ſignalizes

lizes itſelf by ſingularity; and, not being yet adopted by the ſtate, our religion was ſtill unadulterated by thoſe approaches which it afterwards made, from a principle of complaiſance, to paganiſm. Yet, had a confeſſion been compoſed even in this period, it would probably have contained ſeveral doctrines which, at this day, ſuppoſing it to have come down as a catholic ſtandard to our age, might have ſtartled every body but the orthodox. For inſtance, ſuppoſe that one of the articles had been that the books of the ſybils were written by divine inſpiration; and, conſequently, to ſay the leaſt, were of equal authority with the prophets of the Old Teſtament. Suppoſe that Juſtin, Clement, or Origen, who were leaders of the church in their day, had had intereſt enough to get the Platonical notion of the pre-exiſtence of ſouls inſerted as another. Suppoſe that Tertullian or Lactantius had inſiſted on admitting the opinion of the ſoul's *materiality*, and that God had a body, as a third. Laſtly, ſuppoſe the celebrated doctrine of the millenary

to complete the creed. Theſe were all prevailing opinions in thoſe days, and theſe were all celebrated men. Here now, ye orthodox! is a confeſſion, compoſed by men as orthodox as yourſelves. What ſay ye to it?

I will conclude this part of the ſubject by making a few obſervations upon the *manner* in which the oppoſite party have managed this diſpute with Mr. A. B. For, I own, there is nothing which gives me a greater ſuſpicion of the frailty of our ſtandards than this very circumſtance.

When received opinions are attacked, the members of eſtabliſhment have two methods of proceeding in their power, and it is to be expected that they will follow the one or the other of theſe according as it may beſt ſuit their particular views. They may either ſubmit the opinions themſelves to a fair examination, and reform if, upon trial, they ſhall be found erroneous; or they may take the advantage which eſtabliſhment affords them, proceed upon the foundation of

ſub-

ſubſcription, eject at once from their ſociety thoſe who have the temerity to attack its tenets, and brand them with the names of heretics and faithleſs. Now, I believe it will be granted that the having recourſe to the laſt of theſe methods is always, to ſay the leaſt, exceedingly ſuſpicious. And yet, I am ſorry to obſerve that this is the very method which thoſe who have given in anſwers to Mr. A. B. have univerſally adopted.

Some points of mere diſcipline excepted, quite foreign to the main queſtion, have they once attempted to defend thoſe opinions which Mr. A. B. has, as they complain, ſo immodeſtly attacked? On the contrary, have they not, in the moſt ſummary manner, treated his attempt as preſumptuous? Have they not, with ſuch circumſtances of ſuſpicion as would tempt a neutral perſon like me to think that the *ſecrets* of the ſociety were betrayed, clamoured againſt their brother as *faithleſs* and *perjured*, and, in effect, called upon him to leave their communion? Nay, have they not, as far as lay in their power,

actually endeavoured to elicite againſt him the thunders of eſtabliſhment? Inſtances of all theſe ſhall be minutely enlarged upon in the courſe of the argument. At preſent, I would avoid being tedious.

Upon this method of proceeding I would juſt obſerve, that nothing can excuſe men for having recourſe to it—I do not here uſe the term *juſtify*—but one of theſe two reaſons;—either that the firſt method has been previouſly tried, that the articles excepted againſt have, on a thorough ſcrutiny, been found juſt, and that the oppoſers of them, notwithſtanding the cleareſt evidence, remain obſtinate and incorrigible: or that the firſt method, owing to acknowledged cauſes, is altogether ſuperfluous, and in effect ſuperſeded. Where the firſt of theſe reaſons is not pretended, there is a neceſſity for alledging the ſecond. Now, Gentlemen! allow me to ſet this reaſon of yours in its proper light, and I have done. The examination of the conteſted articles is, you ſay, ſuperfluous, and ſuperſeded. Nay, you do aſſert this, and in the ſtrongeſt manner;

ner; for nothing leſs can excuſe your preſent conduct to the public. Now this examination can only be ſuperfluous upon ſuppoſition that theſe articles are ſo clear in themſelves as to need no examination; and you can aſſign no other reaſon for its being ſuperſeded but a previous eſtabliſhment, made, we will ſuppoſe, an hundred years ago. In other words, your method of proceeding againſt Mr. A. B. in the preſent inſtance, *ſuppoſes* every thing which ought to be *proved* before one chriſtian can, in *conſcience*, proceed to harſh extremities againſt another. It proceeds entirely upon the ſuppoſition that ſubſcription is warrantable in general, and that the preſent ſubſcription in particular, is beyond diſpute unexceptionable. I would not ſwell this performance by adducing unneceſſary mediums in very plain reaſonings. Theſe appear to me to be the *premiſes* which Mr. A. B.'s antagoniſts have hitherto gone upon; and I would be glad to ſee my concluſion not only denied, but, which is much more material, diſproved.

There is, however, one way of evading the conſequences of this reaſoning. It may be pretended that all enquiries on this ſubject are in effect ſuperſeded, and rendered *ſuperfluous* by an act of parliament. This, no doubt, decides the matter at once; and, if the other party will but place it on this footing, it will alſo render it ſuperfluous for *me* to ſay another word about it—to *them* at leaſt. An act of parliament is certainly the foundation, and a very *ſure* one it is, of every monopoly as well as this. The parliament has given a certain ſociety an excluſive *patent*, annexing ſuch and ſuch emoluments to the teaching, preaching, maintaining, and ſuſtaining ſuch and ſuch tenets as are therein ſpecified. I ſay again, this reaſoning muſt be unanſwerable; for, if it were not, it would not be ſo frequently made uſe of by the leaders, that is to ſay, the *wiſeſt men*, of all churches, as we find it is. It were only to be wiſhed that theſe unanſwerable advocates for ſubſcription, who abhor nothing ſo much as diſſimulation in matters of religion, would

give us one little, additional ſpecimen of their ſincerity, by altering certain *terms* which have inſenſibly crept into their reaſonings on this ſubject; and, inſtead of talking concerning miniſters, ſpiritual concerns, chriſtian communion, &c. ſay in plain words, ſo as unlearned people may underſtand them,—"That Jeſus Chriſt has rendered a piece of good ſervice to civil ſociety, by furniſhing government with an uſeful *corps* of conſtables to keep the peace of the country."

Serioufly, it may be laid down as a lamentable truth, that though the firſt of the two methods mentioned above is that to which common honeſty, as well as all juſt principles of reaſoning, would direct a ſociety, whoſe tenets are attacked; yet we cannot hope the advocates for eſtabliſhment will ever have recourſe to this method when they can avoid it. It is much eaſier, and anſwers the purpoſes of mere defence infinitely better, to lay down the *conſtitution* as a principle; and then nothing remains but to draw conſequences. It is not ſurpriſing, therefore,

that they ſhould have made uſe of this method on this occaſion. It is calculated to ſpare them much labour, and vexation of argument. But it is a little ſurpriſing that Mr. A. B.'s advocates ſhould have taken up the argument on this ground, and engaged at ſuch manifeſt diſadvantage. Intrenched behind the *conſtitution*, the ſtandard-bearers of this land have nothing to fear, and may ſpread their enſigns to the gale of popular applauſe without danger. And yet Luther had fairer play allowed him by the church of Rome * than Mr. A. B. is likely to have from the proteſtant church of Scotland. The conteſted tenets were referred to the teſt of public diſputation; the plea of conſtitution was waved; and an opportunity was given him to ſupport his opinions by their proper principles. It muſt be confeſſed, however, that his antagoniſts were *compelled* to this conduct. The ſpirit of eſtabliſhment was ſuſpended by the interpoſition of the civil power. At

* At the time this was written, the proceſs was ſtill depending.

the

the ſame time, this whole tranſaction ſhews, in a ſtrong light, what the common ſenſe of mankind is with regard to the conduct proper to be obſerved by the members of an eſtabliſhment when their tenets are attacked. Let them, previous to all other ſteps, defend theſe tenets. Love of truth leads to no other method of proceeding. It is alſo the only way by which either their oppoſers can be convicted, or the world ſatisfied that they are at leaſt confuted. The ſenſe of mankind muſt be very clear indeed in this point, when even the church of Rome, in order to preſerve a ſemblance of juſtice in their proceedings, and to give an appearance of anſwering what the public expected from them, could not get over it. What pity that they ſhould have intended nothing but an appearance!

But what is all this towards freeing Mr. A. B. and thoſe of his ſentiments, from the charge of diſſimulation? I confeſs this was not my principal intention. As it is not eaſy, however, for a perſon of common humanity to ſit ſtill, and ſee

an honeſt man calumniated; I take the the liberty to aſſert, and I do it with the greater boldneſs, as I am pretty certain of being joined by every man of liberal ſentiments, that, upon the foregoing principles, Mr. A. B.'s juſtification is complete. It is evident, if the above reaſoning be juſt, that his plea ſtands upon the very ſame ground, in this article, with that of our reformers. If Mr. A. B. is guilty of diſſimulation, then Luther was a diſſembler. More ſtill, from this ſtate of facts and principles, he appears in the light of a diſintereſted friend to truth, and an advocate againſt impoſitions in religion of every kind. Laſtly, from the ſame principles it follows, that if diſſimulation is ſuſpected in the caſe, it is more natural, as well as more agreeable to the hiſtory of religion, to look for it on the other ſide of the queſtion, and among the oppoſite party. It will, at leaſt, be allowed that the *intereſt* lies there.

Mr. A. B. calls upon *them* to *reform*. *They* call to *him* to leave their ſociety if any thing diſpleaſes him. "Your tenets

are

are abſurd, and your conſtitution upon a wrong foundation," cries A. B. "Get about your buſineſs, Sir!" reply the members of eſtabliſhment. What are we to think of ſuch an anſwer?

We certainly have the ſame right to call for a reformation, if we think it neceſſary, as our fathers had. This will be granted. And, if this call proceeds from an office-bearer in the eſtabliſhment itſelf, the only concluſion which a candid man would be led to draw from it is,—that this very circumſtance affords an additional, and peculiar preſumption, that it *is* neceſſary. With regard to the degree of the neceſſity at *this* period, I believe it is not ſo great *now* as it was at the reformation; yet every intelligent man will allow that, with reſpect to ſome philoſophical points at leaſt, our religious notions may be preſumed juſter than thoſe of the reformers were, or indeed *could* be. It is really aſtoniſhing that, in a church founded upon proteſtant principles, a man cannot *preſume* to talk in this ſtile without opening ſo deep a cry, and expoſing himſelf

ſelf to the danger of being loaded with a number of paſſionate epithets,—merely as an enemy to the *ſociety*,—for this is the ground upon which their argument has all along profeſſedly proceeded,— as if the *ſociety* could have any intereſts ſeparate from thoſe of *truth*. Such a proceeding evidently tempts one to think it had. If ſo,—who are the honeſt party? Thoſe who *expoſe*, or thoſe who *clamour*?

It is very remarkable that there has not an argument been adduced againſt Mr. A. B. ſince the beginning of this controverſy, which might not, with equal propriety, have been adduced by the church of Rome againſt Luther, or Calvin, or any of the firſt reformers. Nay they actually were adduced. So true it is that the advocates for all eſtabliſhments are the ſame, and proceed upon the ſame principles. We forget, in the heat of our zeal, that the authors of our own conſtitution were once in the ſame ſituation in which Mr. A. B. is now, — that their regard for truth and conſcience ſubjected them to the very ſame reproaches.

Why,

Why, it is aſked, did A. B. ſubſcribe thoſe articles which he now diſavows? This queſtion may be anſwered by another equally pertinent. Why did Luther and Calvin, when they entered into orders, ſubſcribe the canons of the church of Rome? But, if Mr. A. B. is convinced of error, why does he not, at leaſt, relinquiſh a ſociety with whoſe inſtitutions he can no longer comply? Why there is ſomething in this. This was preciſely what the church of Rome forced our reformers to do. Nay they often went a ſtep farther. They not unfrequently committed them to the flames, as an additional puniſhment for their preſumption in differing from eſtabliſhment. The church of Scotland happily has not been in the exerciſe of this laſt power for ſome time. No, Gentlemen! thank God! that is all over with you.

For my part, I cannot help thinking that Mr. A. B. has amply diſcharged his conſcience by making his opinions public. In this he has acted like an honeſt man. At the ſame time, the diffe-

rence

rence of tenets is not of ſuch moment, in my view, as to warrant either a *ſeceſſion in him*, or a *conſtitutional* exertion of power in the *church*, — though ſome may think he has laid himſelf at her mercy. And, indeed, we ſeem to lie all, in ſome reſpects, at the mercy of one another at preſent. Such is our hard fate in this period.

With regard to the point which has been debated relating to the ſenſe in which ſubſcriptions may be made, whether a man may ſafely ſubſcribe in ſuch a particular ſenſe; — I ſhall, by and by, conſider it at large. I confeſs ingenuouſly that many things have been advanced very much to the purpoſe on both ſides of the queſtion*. But this, as hath been obſerved, is not the proper ſtate of the debate. This is, indeed, but an inferior argument. However, ſince it is in agitation, before I come to examine particu-

* Thoſe who are curious to ſee the whole hiſtory of this debate may conſult the Scots Magazines for April, May, July, and October 1767,—and thoſe for January and March 1768.

larly

larly the reaſonings upon it, I ſhall here venture another ſtate of that ſubject on which I ſhould be glad that the friends of truth would alſo give their ſentiments.

It may be laid down as a general principle in ſubſcribing any deed whatever, that the ſubſcriber ſubſcribes it in the ſenſe of thoſe who require the ſubſcription, unleſs he emits an expreſs declaration explaining the ſenſe in which he does ſubſcribe. In the preſent caſe it is the *church* which requires the ſubſcription. Every ſubſcriber, therefore, ſubſcribes in the ſenſe of the *church*. Now, who repreſent the *church?* The primitive compoſers and eſtabliſhers of our confeſſion are dead. *Their* repreſentation ended with their lives. The ſame may be ſaid of the ſucceeding clergy, down to the preſent generation. None of theſe, therefore, can repreſent the church to a ſubſcriber: neither the aſſembly of divines who were the compilers of our confeſſion, nor the general aſſembly at Edinburgh who firſt received, and procured it to be propoſed as a teſt to the nation, nor

any

any of the ſubſequent aſſemblies. The *church* muſt, therefore, be repreſented to every ſubſcriber by that preciſe number of living miniſters on the ſpot who require his ſubſcription. Again, the ſenſe of the church is the ſenſe of the majority of its component members. He muſt, therefore, ſubſcribe in the ſenſe of the *majority* of that particular quorum, whether it be a Preſbytery, a Synod, an Aſſembly, or a Commiſſion, which takes his trials, whether as a miniſter or probationer. Now, I will engage to ſubſcribe the confeſſion in the ſenſe of the *majority* of moſt Preſbyteries in Scotland at preſent, and I will engage that this ſenſe ſhall not be far different from Mr. A. B's *. I declare I am not conſcious of having uſed any ſophiſtry in the above argument. It appears plain to me, and convincing. However, I am quite docible, and ſhall reckon myſelf obliged to any

* This ſtate of ſubſcription ſuppoſes the formula of 1711 out of the queſtion. It relates entirely to the confeſſion. My reaſon for this will appear afterwards.

perſon

perſon who will ſhew me where it is defective—always provided he employs decent language.

But ſtill I aſk, why have the advocates for ſubſcription poured all their force into *this* quarter? Why have they directed their main batteries againſt a point which Mr. A. B. made uſe of only as an auxiliary to his principal deſign?—a point which is of no importance to doctrinal truth, of whatever conſequence it may be to political eſtabliſhments. Have they not, by this conduct, laid us under the neceſſity of charging them with a premature reſolution to defend eſtabliſhment independent of *truth* and *juſtice*, and whether it be right or wrong? One end, indeed, their conduct has anſwered. They have, by this method, found means to ſhift off the attack from themſelves upon A. B. They muſt, however, be told that this method of *managing* will never impreſs any body with a better opinion of the juſtice of their cauſe. They muſt be reminded that, though they ſhould even make good this charge of diſſimulation,

nay of perjury itſelf upon Mr. A. B. this will not free *them*, in the ſmalleſt degree, from the accuſation, which he has publickly preferred againſt the whole party, of holding abſurd and uncharitable opinions. At the ſame time, Mr. A. B. may be very eaſy under a charge which cannot be ſupported but upon *Romiſh* principles.

The concluſion from the whole foregoing reaſoning is this.—Let the ſuſpected articles, together with the ſubſcription which enjoins them, be made the ſubject of ſolemn deliberation at the firſt enſuing aſſembly. Let the orthodox party, (I hope I alſo may be allowed to uſe the term without a ſneer) who have undertaken this diſpute, make an overture for this purpoſe. In the mean time, until the event of that deliberation be known, let hoſtilities be mutually ſuſpended. If it come out to be the general ſenſe that they are hardſhips, let every proper, every judicial ſtep be immediately taken to amend them.—What a noble example will this ſet to our neighbour church of England,

where

where the voice of religious liberty is ſtill louder than in this kingdom! The ſubject is canvaſſed there at preſent with infinite earneſtneſs. Would to God the preſent generation may be witneſſes of the glorious iſſue! What a memorable epoch would ſo illuſtrious a revolution make in the annals of chriſtianity! But,—if the event come out contrary, then may Mr. Fergusſon, and the moral clergy of this kingdom, be abuſed with greater appearance of reaſon. Let their enemies exclaim againſt their apoſtacy,—but let *them* firſt do *their* duty.

PART II.

YOU will often have obſerved in a company, that, when a diſagreeable ſubject hath been ſtarted, ſome *conſcientious* gentleman has attempted to wave it, by obſerving that it was fine weather, or aſking what's o'clock. The preſent caſe is entirely ſimilar.

Since the queſtion, however, has been put, we ſhall not abſolutely decline it. We ſhall proceed, in this part, to conſider the preſent ſtate of ſubſcription in this church. It will be worth while to know on what footing we actually ſtand in this reſpect. The enquiry itſelf is important, and, as the debate is ſtill new in this kingdom, a few periods more will not, it is preſumed, overload it.

Enormous violations of the common and moſt obvious rights of mankind can be eſtabliſhed only by degrees. Were they

they offered without preparation, they would affront our underſtanding, and be rejected with contempt or horror. The ſteps leading to the laſt act muſt be ſlow, and the gradations imperceptible. The church of Rome did not all at once aſcribe infallibility to the dictates of her Pope, nor did the proteſtant churches at firſt think of arrogating it to the tenets of their confeſſions. To vindicate the reformed from the aſperſons of their enemies, to produce their opinions to the world with a view that mankind might judge of their truth, ſeems to have been the original intention of confeſſions. The church of Scotland, in particular, ſet an illuſtrious example of proteſtant moderation. Far from conſidering her confeſſion as fixing the tenets of her members, ſhe expreſly invites their objections, and promiſes to amend upon conviction. In this form the firſt Scots confeſſion came * abroad, not as the permanent deciſions of

* Denunciamus igitur, omneſque adeo rogamus, ſi quis aut caput aliquod, aut etiam ſententiam, cum

of a church, but as the private ſenſe of individuals. In this form it received the ſubſcriptions of the nation, and the approbation of the legiſlature. Nor is this moderation to be conſidered only as a verbal compliment which the leaders of the church at that time offered to private judgment. It was founded upon the great principle of the reformation,—the paramount authority of the ſcriptures, and the fallibility of human deciſions. Tho' they did not carry this principle into effect in its full extent, though they even loſt ſight of it, it muſt be owned, on many occaſions, yet ſtill they retained a general view of it, and frequently acted in conſequence. The preſent is a remarkable in-

ſancto Dei verbo pugnantem hic animanverterit, ut pro ſua humanitate, proque eo amore, quo Chriſtum Chriſtique gregem proſequitur, nos per literas admoneat: Id qui fecerit, ſancte ei promittimus, nos eidem, aut ex ore Dei, hoc eſt ex ſacræ ſcripturæ oraculo ſatisfacturos, aut quod ſecus a nobis dictum, demonſtraverit, emendaturos.

See preface or introduction to the Scots confeſſion of faith authoriſed by the eſtates of parliament 1560, eſtabliſhed by law 1567, printed St. Andrew's 1572.

ſtance

ſtance where they did ſo. Nothing can be a clearer proof that our church at that time never intended her confeſſion to be permanent, except its actual alteration, ſome conſiderable time after, when ſhe aboliſhed her old confeſſion, and adopted that of Weſtminſter.

Before we enter directly upon the argument as it ſtands at preſent, it will be worth while to give a ſhort hiſtory of this latter confeſſion, and of the principal acts of our parliament and aſſembly which have been made in its favour. In this hiſtory we will trace the progreſs of eccleſiaſtical impoſition, and ſee diſtinctly the ſeveral ſteps by which our religious conſtitution returned to the infallible chair, from whence ſhe now emits her thunders, and terrifies her ſons into ſubmiſſion.

1ſt, We have reaſon to think that the Weſtminſter divines themſelves, the compoſers of this confeſſion, were, in their own minds, no friends to ſuch eſtabliſhments as the orthodox contend for. Though the minutes and records of that

aſſembly are not now, perhaps, acceſſible; we are aſſured, by credible hiſtorians, that the members themſelves were far from being unanimous. On the contrary, they were divided into factions, who differed widely in their opinions, and entered diſſents and proteſts.—The confeſſion itſelf was never ſubſcribed by any of the members except the prolocutor, aſſeſſors, and clerks.—What is more remarkable ſtill, we are told by Mr. Nye, a member of that aſſembly, in his *beams of former light*, publiſhed when many members of it were alive, that the Scots commiſſioners propoſed in that aſſembly that the anſwers in the ſhorter catechiſm ſhould be ſubſcribed by all the members, but that this propoſal was actually rejected as an unwarrantable impoſition.—The advice which the ſame aſſembly gave to the parliament in their time runs in the following terms. They only adviſe, "that the perſon to be ordained be aſked of his faith in Jeſus Chriſt; of his perſuaſion of the truth of the reformed religion according to the ſcriptures, and of his zeal for

the truth of the goſpel, and unity of the church, againſt error and ſchiſm." This I think is an evident preſumption that the majority of that aſſembly were againſt impoſing human teſts, and making ſubſcription to their confeſſion a neceſſary term of communion either to miniſters or other chriſtians.—In chapter xxxi. ſect. 4. of the confeſſion itſelf, we have the following expreſs declaration in their own words. "All ſynods and councils ſince the apoſtles times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred: therefore, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be uſed as an *help*, in both." This ſhews explicitely what the ſenſe of theſe divines was concerning the degree of authority with which it is proper to inveſt confeſſions. It ſhews what their ſenſe was of the authority of their own confeſſion in particular, and the uſe which it would be proper to make of it in this nation. All human compoſitions of this kind are to be uſed as an *help*, not as a *rule*. Words cannot be more expreſs. In like manner, the dif-

different prefaces prefixed to the confeſſion and directory proceed upon the ſame principle; and with this view, recommend them particularly to heads of families. Speaking of the uſe of the directory to miniſters, their words are—"Our meaning therein being only, that the general heads, the ſenſe and ſcope of the prayers, and other parts of public worſhip, being known to all, there may be a conſent of all the churches in thoſe things that contain the *ſubſtance* of the ſervice and worſhip of God; and the miniſters may be hereby directed in their adminiſtrations, to keep like ſoundneſs in doctrine and prayer, and may, if need be, have ſome help and furniture, and yet ſo as they become not hereby ſlothful and negligent in ſtirring up the gifts of Chriſt in them; but that each one, by meditation, by taking heed to himſelf and the flock of God committed to him, and by wiſe obſerving the ways of divine providence, may be careful to furniſh his heart and tongue with further or other materials of prayer and exhortation, as

ſhall

ſhall be needful on all occaſions." Here one may diſcern the ſame moderate ſpirit as in their ſentiments of the confeſſion. They recommend it in *general*, as tending to promote uniformity, and as a *help*, which, however, they ſay expreſly was not meant to ſuperſede the exerciſe of their own judgment.—The reaſon which they aſſign in the ſame place for aboliſhing the Engliſh litergy, and ſubſtituting the directory in its place, is a reaſon which ſubſiſts equally ſtrong in every age, and which they muſt have ſeen might, in ſome future period, be alleged with equal juſtice for ſetting aſide that directory likewiſe, and introducing a new one. It is no other than the advantages, in point of knowledge, which they flattered themſelves they poſſeſſed over the compoſers of that liturgy. They beſtow great encomiums on theſe primitive reformers. They acknowledge that they redreſſed many things which they, in their time, diſcovered to be wrong; but then though they allow this, they deny that their reformation was complete. They give a reaſon why it could not be complete. They expreſly

mention, "that, in their own times, God had vouchſafed more and better means for the diſcovery of error and ſuperſtition, and for attaining knowledge; and they are perſuaded that theſe firſt reformers themſelves, if they were then alive, would join them in the work, and unite their endeavours to bring the church to a ſtill greater degree of purity." This is evidently the genuine ſpirit of reformation. It is the ſpirit itſelf of chriſtianity, untinctured with the wrath of man, and uncorrupted by the influence of eſtabliſhment.

2*dly*, Our General Aſſembly in 1647, which adopted that confeſſion, acted upon the ſame moderate principles. Though they approved of the confeſſion, they made no act obliging miniſters and probationers to ſubſcribe it, nor a formula declaring their aſſent and adherence to the doctrines contained in it as founded on, and agreeable to the ſcriptures.

3*dly*, That Aſſembly itſelf did not believe every article contained in the confeſſion. For inſtance, the Weſtminſter divines,

divines, in chap. 23d, part 3d, chap. 31ſt, part 2d, adopted the doctrine of Zwinglius, who allowed the civil government to have authority, and that it was its duty to meddle in religious matters. But our Aſſembly, in the very act by which they adopted that confeſſion, rejected that article, and affirmed Calvin's doctrine, which denies ſuch authority and duty. This is one inſtance where the diſſent was unanimous. But there was likewiſe an oppoſition upon many other articles. The fact is, that the confeſſion itſelf was agreed to only after much debate. This is a proof that the members of that Aſſembly not only thought the Weſtminſter Aſſembly fallible; but alſo, that they never intended that it ſhould be neceſſary to believe *every* article of their confeſſion. It is a proof that they approved of that confeſſion as containing general truth, and as agreeable to the word of God, and to *their ſentiments*, only upon the *whole*. The terms of the act itſelf, indeed, imply as much—namely, that the General Aſſembly, after mature deliberation,

deliberation, agreed unto, and approved the ſaid confeſſion *as to the truth of the matter*.

4thly, The act of parliament, Charles I. parl. 2. ſeſſ. 2. act 16. paſſed in the year 1649, which firſt ratified this confeſſion, runs in the following terms. "The eſtates of parliament—do ratify and approve the ſaid Catechiſms, Confeſſion of Faith, and acts of approbation of the ſame, produced as it is; and ordains them to be recorded, publiſhed, and practiſed. Here the civil legiſlature concurs with the church, and ratifies the Confeſſion in the ſtate in which that Aſſembly had left it, and in their ſenſe of it. No formula, no ſubſcription is thought of. Neither court, civil or religious, ever dreamt of ſuch an impoſition.

It was not till after the revolution that ſubſcription to this confeſſion, or even a formal aſſent to it by miniſters and probationers, was enacted into a law in this church. It was in the year 1693 that it was again ratified by our parliament, who further enacted, "that no perſon be admitted,

mitted, or continued for hereafter, to be a miniſter or preacher within this church, unleſs he ſubſcribe that Confeſſion, declaring the ſame to be the confeſſion of his faith, and that he owns the doctrine contained in it to be the true doctrine which he will conſtantly adhere to."

This clauſe, no doubt, produced a very material alteration in our religious eſtabliſhment. It drew our bands ſtraiter than they had ever been ſince that Confeſſion was firſt adopted by our church. A portion of the firſt moderate ſpirit, however, ſtill remained, as appears from ſix circumſtances.

1*ſt*, This act requires ſubſcription to the Confeſſion of Faith "ratified in the fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of the current parliament." This latter act is, therefore, the original foundation, and the ſubſcription now required muſt be explained by it. The parliament could not require us to ſubſcribe the Confeſſion in any other ſenſe than that in which they themſelves had eſtabliſhed it. It is, however, by that act, eſtabliſhed—"as containing

containing the *ſum* and *ſubſtance* of the doctrine of the reformed churches;" that is, it is eſtabliſhed, not as being true in *every* article, but as agreeable, in *general*, to the *capital* principles of the reformation.

2*dly*, This act eſtabliſhes the church of Scotland, not as a church ſeparated, by ſome diſtinguiſhing ſpeculative tenets, from every other reformed church of a different denomination; but on the general principle of oppoſition to theſe two capital branches of error, as they were then accounted, popery and epiſcopacy. The whole tenor of the act exactly points to this purpoſe. There is not the ſmalleſt appearance of its being meant to extend to minute, doctrinal diſtinctions. The viſible intention of it is to diſtinguiſh, and ſecure our church as a preſbyterian, proteſtant eſtabliſhment. This is the characterizing, and original principle of our religious conſtitution. Even in ratifying the abolition of epiſcopacy, the legiſlature is cautious; and proceeds upon the foundation of its being contrary, not

to the ſcriptures, but to the inclinations of the people of this kingdom.

3dly, The ſame moderate ſpirit marks every part of their eſtabliſhment. After ratifying the Confeſſion of Faith as containing *general truth*, they eſtabliſh and confirm preſbyterian church government and diſcipline, not as being agreeable to the ſcriptures, but as the only government of this church; and, *as ſuch*, they require every miniſter or preacher to acknowledge its authority, and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, its prejudice or ſubverſion.

4thly, The act of 1690 goes ſtill a ſtep farther. In that part of it which relates to uniformity of worſhip, and the adminiſtration of public ordinances, after binding us "to obſerve theſe as the ſame are at preſent performed or allowed in this church," it adds—"or ſhall be hereafter declared by the authority of the ſame." Here liberty is expreſly left us to depart from our ſubſcription, in theſe articles, when ſuch a departure ſhall be thought proper. This is an evident

proof that the civil legiſlature never meant that the conſtitution of this church, as then ſettled, ſhould, in every point, and at all events, be permanent.

5thly, The General Aſſembly of 1690, who firſt required ſubſcription, and who may be conſidered as the explainers as well as executors of the civil enactment, proceeded upon the ſame mild principles. For the act which they paſſed upon the occaſion runs thus.—"That all probationers licenſed to preach, all intrants into the miniſtry, and all other miniſters and elders received into communion with us in church government, be obliged to ſubſcribe their *approbation* of the Confeſſion of Faith, approven by former General Aſſemblies of this church, and ratified in the ſecond ſeſſion of the current parliament."

6thly, The different Preſbyteries in Scotland, to whom diligence was recommended in this matter, underſtood this act of the Aſſembly in this ſenſe. Let it be obſerved that no general form of ſubſcription was enacted by this Aſſembly.

This circumſtance was left entirely to the diſcretion of the ſeveral Preſbyteries. Accordingly, different Preſbyteries deviſed different forms. Theſe forms all agree in this great circumſtance,—they require only *general* approbation.

I cannot here avoid drawing together the different modes of expreſſion employed by church and ſtate on this occaſion. The General Aſſembly of 1647, which firſt received this Confeſſion, agreed unto it *as to the truth of the matter:* the revolution parliament, which fixed our national church, eſtabliſhed it *as containing the ſum and ſubſtance of the reformed doctrines:* the Aſſembly of 1690, which firſt acted in conſequence of this eſtabliſhment, required the members of the church to ſubſcribe their *approbation* of it: and the parliament of 1693, which confirmed this ſubſcription, enjoin them to acknowledge it as *the true doctrine*:—a phraſe, common in this period, and uſed to denote the reformed doctrines in *general* as diſtinguiſhed from popery.

In the year 1694, the General Aſſembly renewed the act which they had made

in the year 1690; and, with the ſame views probably from which the parliament had voted in the year preceding, and in conſequence of the powers then given them, they compoſed a Formula for epiſcopal miniſters, which it was enacted theſe miniſters ſhould ſubſcribe before they could be admitted into this church. This Formula, which is the firſt general one enacted by our church, and the only one which at this day has the ſanction of the civil authority, is as follows.

"I ——— do ſincerely own and declare the above Confeſſion of Faith, approven by former General Aſſemblies of this church, and ratified by law in the year 1690, to be the confeſſion of my faith; and that I own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine, which I will conſtantly adhere to; as likewiſe that I own and acknowledge preſbyterian church government of this church, now ſettled by law, by Kirk-ſeſſions, Preſbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Aſſemblies, to be the only government of this church; and that I will ſubmit thereto,

to, concur therewith, and never endeavour, directly nor indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion hereof: and that I ſhall obſerve uniformity of worſhip, and of the adminiſtration of all public ordinances within this church, as the ſame are at preſent performed and allowed." This is called the Formula of 1694.

This Formula, though agreeing in the main articles, yet carries matters one ſtep farther than the act of parliament on which it is founded. For that act comprehended a clauſe which allowed room for change of ſentiment, in certain articles, in caſe the church ſhould judge it right. The act of Aſſembly omits this clauſe, and enjoins an unlimited adherence*.

In January, 1696, the Aſſembly proceeded ſtill another ſtep in the road to eccleſiaſtical deſpotiſm. For they then diſcharge "all miniſters and other members of this church to vent, either by

* In this, and other places of this hiſtory, I give the ſenſe of the church as it is underſtood by the orthodox.

ſpeaking, writing, printing, teaching, or preaching, any doctrine, tenet, or opinion, contrair unto, or inconſiſtent with the Confeſſion of Faith of this church, or any article, part, or propoſition therein; and appoint that all ſuch as contravene this act, or any part thereof, be cenſured by the church according to their demerit." It may here be remarked,

1*ſt*, This Aſſembly did not conſider that the Aſſembly of 1647 had rejected the right of the civil magiſtrate to meddle in ſacris, which made it lawful for any member of this church to ſpeak and write againſt *that* article. Yet this Aſſembly diſcharges us to write againſt it. Our church is, therefore, reduced here to an evident dilemma. If ſhe meant to ſupport our conſtitution as it was originally eſtabliſhed, ſhe is guilty of a contradiction. If ſhe meant to improve upon the original eſtabliſhment, ſhe, by the ſame deed, and in the ſame breath, prohibits all innovation, and ſets an example of it.

2*dly*, All the acts hitherto made had required only general approbation. They

do

do not ſeem to extend minutely to every particular article; and, conſequently, miniſters, &c. were not hitherto prohibited from preaching or writing againſt every article. The chain of ſubſcription is, therefore, here drawn a degree ſtraiter.

3*dly*, Although miniſters are, by this act, prohibited from ſpeaking or writing againſt every article of the Confeſſion, yet ſtill they are not bound to ſubſcribe to the truth of every article. The ſubſcription is, therefore, ſtill general, and the church ſtill retained a remainder of moderation.

We return to the Formula of 1694. Hitherto this Formala was partial. It extended only to epiſcopal miniſters. In the year 1700 the Aſſembly rendered it *general*, by paſſing the following act, "That all miniſters and ruling elders belonging to this national church ſubſcribe the Confeſſion of Faith, as the confeſſion of their faith, according to the act of the Aſſembly 1690, and the Formula agreed upon in the Aſſembly 1694." On this act we may obſerve,

1*ſt*, The ſpirit of moderation was not yet exhauſted. The church ſeems to have been ſlow in carrying the powers intruſted with her by the ſtate into execution. She might have paſſed this act ſix years ſooner, and been ſupported by the civil power.

2*dly*, When ſhe did paſs it, ſhe extended it only to miniſters and ruling elders. Preachers are not mentioned, nor do we find that this Formula was ever adminiſtered to them.

3*dly*, By this Formula a man is not required to declare that he believes the doctrines contained in the Confeſſion to be agreeable to the ſcriptures. He only owns it to be the *true doctrine*.

4*thly*, The ſame obſervation may be made on that part of it which relates to church-government. It requires only that a man acknowledge that the preſbyterian form of government is the only government of this church. It requires him not to declare that he believes it to be founded on the word of God.

The

The return of our church toward the chair of infallibility became every day more rapid. In 1705 the Aſſembly recommended "that none ſhould be licenſed to preach, or admitted to churches, but ſuch as ſhall own the preſbyterian government of this church to be agreeable to, and founded on the word of God, and promiſe never to endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion thereof." Obſerve here—

1*ſt*, No Act of Aſſembly had hitherto carried this point farther than to require that the candidates ſhould acknowledge that the preſbyterian form of government is the only government of this church, and promiſe to ſubmit to it as ſuch, and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion thereof.

2*dly*, The law of the land, upon which religious eſtabliſhments, as ſuch, are all founded, and beyond which they do not bind, did not authorize ſuch a recommendation.

It is worth obſerving here, that, amid theſe rapid advances which our Aſſemblies

blies were making towards abſolute eſtabliſhment, the clergy, throughout this kingdom, ſeem ſtill to have proceeded in this road with diffidence and reluctance. Even after paſſing theſe acts and reſolutions, the inferior judicatories of this church were tardy, and diſcovered an evident averſion, for ſome time, to carry them into execution. Though the Formula of 1694 was enacted and expreſly impoſed on the church in the year 1700, it appears, from authentic evidence, that there never was an univerſal ſubſcription of it, even by miniſters, from that æra until 1711, when the preſent Formula was introduced. There ſeems to have been a general conſciouſneſs or ſuſpicion that a departure was made from the principles of the conſtitution, or that the unalienable rights of mankind were invaded.

It was in 1711 that the laſt ſtroke was given to our religious liberties. But as this is a moſt remarkable epoch in the hiſtory of our church, before I mention the regulations enacted by that Aſſembly, I ſhall, from the account already given,

ſtate

ſtate ſubſcription, in a few words, as it ſtood immediately before that period.

Before that period, then, the church and ſtate agreed in the following requiſitions.

1*ſt*, That all miniſters ſubſcribe their approbation of the doctrine contained in the Confeſſion of Faith as the *true doctrine*.—That this was regarded as no more than a general ſubſcription is evident, not only from the tenor of the ſubſcription itſelf, but from its very alteration now to one more particular.

2*dly*, That they acknowledge the Preſbyterian form of church-government, by Kirk-ſeſſions, Preſbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Aſſemblies, to be the only government of this church.

In theſe two requiſitions both church and ſtate agreed. They had, conſequently, the force of laws.

At the ſame time the Formula which was deviſed to aſcertain theſe requiſitions never, in fact, obtained an univerſal ſubſcription even by miniſters before this period, and preachers never ſubſcribed it at all.

In

In the following point they differed.— The act of parliament required adherence to the method of worſhip performed and allowed in this church only while unaltered by the church itſelf. The act of aſſembly required an unconditional, and unlimited adherence.

Upon this footing ſtood ſubſcription in this kingdom before the year 1711. Any reſolutions of our aſſembly which paſſed not into acts come not under notice in this place.

But the aſſembly of 1711 were diſatisfied with theſe original foundations. Conſcious that all the acts hitherto made in their favour were inſufficient to ſecure permanency to the doctrines and government of this church, and that ſome of them did not even ſeem to be paſſed with this view; ſenſible that the declaration itſelf which the church required of preſent belief was only *general*, and might not be underſtood to extend to every particular article of our confeſſion; they proceeded to a more deciſive meaſure. They deviſed queſtions to be put to miniſters

and

and probationers, and a new Formula to be ſubſcribed by them, unheard of before in our church, and which are evidently dictated by the moſt rigorous ſpirit of eſtabliſhment. Theſe queſtions, and this formula, they enacted by the mere force of their own authority. We ſhall here tranſcribe both.

Queſtions to be put to Probationers.

1*mo*. Do you believe the ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtament to be the word of God, and the only rule of faith and manners? 2*do*. Do you ſincerely own and believe the whole doctrine of the confeſſion of faith, approven by the general aſſemblies of this national church, and ratified by law in the year 1690, and frequently confirmed by divers acts of parliament ſince that time, to be the truths of God contained in the ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtaments? And do you own the whole doctrine therein contained as the confeſſion of your faith? 3*tio*. Do you ſincerely own the purity of

worſhip

worſhip preſently authoriſed and practiſed in this church, and aſſerted in the 15th Act of Aſſ. 1707, entituled, act againſt innovations in the worſhip of God? and alſo own the Preſbyterian government and diſcipline, now ſo happily eſtabliſhed in this church? And are you perſuaded that the ſaid doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline, and church-government are founded upon the holy ſcriptures, and agreeable thereto? 4*to*. Do you promiſe, that, through the grace of God, you will firmly and conſtantly adhere to, and in your ſtation, to the utmoſt of your power, aſſert, maintain, and defend the ſaid doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline, and the government of this church by Kirk-ſeſſions, Preſbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Aſſemblies? 5*to*. Do you promiſe, that in your practice you will conform yourſelf to the ſaid worſhip, and ſubmit yourſelf to the ſaid diſcipline and government of this church? And ſhall never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion of the ſame? 6*to*. Do you promiſe that you ſhall follow no diviſive

courſes

courſes from the preſent eſtabliſhment of the church? *7timo.* Do you renounce all doctrines, tenets or opinions whatſoever, contrary to, or inconſiſtent with the ſaid doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline and government of this church?

FORMULA.

"I——— do hereby declare, that I do ſincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the *Confeſſion of Faith* approven by the general aſſemblies of this national church, and ratified by law in the year 1690, and frequently confirmed by divers acts of parliament ſince that time, to be the truths of God: and I do own the ſame as the confeſſion of my faith. As likewiſe, I do own the purity of worſhip preſently authorized and practiſed in this church; and alſo the Preſbyterian government and diſcipline, now ſo happily eſtabliſhed therein: Which doctrine, worſhip, and church-government, I am perſuaded, are founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto. And I promiſe, that, through the grace of God,

God, I ſhall firmly and conſtantly adhere to the ſame; and, to the utmoſt of my power, ſhall, in my ſtation, aſſert, maintain, and defend the ſaid doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline, and government of this church by Kirk-ſeſſions, Preſbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Aſſemblies; and that I ſhall, in my practice, conform myſelf to the ſaid worſhip, and ſubmit to the ſaid diſcipline and government; and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion of the ſame. And I promiſe, that I ſhall follow no diviſive courſe from the preſent eſtabliſhment in this church: renouncing all doctrines, tenets and opinions whatſoever, contrary to, or inconſiſtent with the ſaid doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline and government of this church." Act 10. Aſſ. 1711.

By this act, ſubſcription underwent the moſt important, poſſible revolution. It was at once changed from *general* to *particular*; and admiſſion into this church, ſufficiently diſtreſſing before, was now reduced within the narroweſt limits, and

ſeemed to ſtand upon the following foundations.

1*ſt*, The moſt particular queſtions were appointed to be put to all candidates, totally excluſive of all latitude.

2*dly*, A particular ſubſcription was required to the *whole* doctrines contained in the Weſtminſter confeſſion, and that not merely as *true*, but the ſubſcriber was expreſly to declare that he believed them to be agreeable to the ſcriptures.

3*dly*, It was as particularly required of him that he declare and ſubſcribe his acknowledgement that the government of this church is founded on the ſcriptures.

4*thly*, This whole tranſaction ſeemed to include a promiſe of unlimited adherence to this doctrine and government.

Having brought the hiſtory of ſubſcription down ſo far, we ſhall now examine, more particularly, the actual ſtate of it as it exiſts at preſent in this kingdom, and the real extent of its binding force upon the members of this church. In doing this, I ſhall treat two points.

1*ſt*, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew that the act of aſſembly of 1711, appointing theſe queſtions and this formula, is unconſtitutional and illegal; that it is an invaſion of our rights as ſubjects, and an infringement of our religious liberties as members of the church of Scotland.

2*dly*, I ſhall ſhew that, admitting this act to be conſtitutional, the terms of it are not ſo rigorous as the orthodox party in our church would endeavour to explain them.

In treating theſe points, I mean not to diſcuſs the queſtion, "what right any ſociety, whether civil or religious, has to make ſuch impoſitions?" I mean only to enquire what is our actual ſituation, and on what foundation the laws of church and ſtate have, in *fact*, placed us.

The firſt point requires no laboured probation. It is reſted upon the moſt expreſs acts of parliament and aſſembly. Proceeding even upon the foundations of the church party, we may lay it down as a principle that every religious eſtabliſh-

ment,

ment, being the creature of the civil legiſlature, is limited, in the very nature of things, by the power to which it owes its exiſtence. The authority of all its meaſures is founded ſolely in this power; and the moment its regulations are extended beyond this, they ceaſe to be binding. The act of parliament of 1693, being the final determination of the ſecular authority, is to be conſidered as the preſent limit of church power; and the formula of 1694, which is founded upon this act, and in every reſpect, except in one article, a faithful copy of it, conſidered with reſpect to its contents is ſtrictly legal, and except in that article where the religious exceeds the civil requiſition, is undoubtedly binding upon this church. But the act of aſſembly of 1711 has manifeſtly exceeded the powers veſted in this church by the act of parliament 1693. It has impoſed regulations which have no foundation in that act. Theſe regulations are, therefore, unconſtitutional and void; and the formula of 1694, with the exception of one article, is the only

formula which, at this day, any miniſter or probationer in this church is legally obliged to ſubſcribe. I ſpeak here of the articles contained in that formula; for as to the formula itſelf, conſidered as an eſtabliſhment, its introduction into this church will alſo be ſhewn to be unconſtitutional, and liable to objections from another quarter.

But the act of aſſembly of 1711 is not only illegal, and an invaſion of our rights as ſubjects; it is unconſtitutional, and an infringement of our liberties as members of the church of Scotland. The powers of the general aſſembly are not only limited by the laws of the ſtate; they are alſo limited by the laws of the church itſelf. We have taken particular care to inveſt this court with no authority which may render her tyrannical, or which may convert her acts into the deciſions of a private cabal. There was an act expreſly paſſed with this view, which I have deferred taking notice of till now. In the year 1697, after the ſubject had been maturely deliberated in every Preſbytery of

of this kingdom, it was enacted, "that before any general aſſembly ſhall paſs any acts which are to be *binding* rules and conſtitutions to the church, the ſame acts ſhall be firſt propoſed as overtures to the aſſembly; and being by them paſſed as ſuch, ſhall be remitted to the conſideration of the ſeveral Preſbyteries of this church, and their opinions and conſent reported to the next general aſſembly following; who may then paſs them into acts, if the more general opinion of the church, thus had, agree thereto." This act, deſervedly ſtyled the barrier act becauſe it is the great ſecurity of our religious liberties, was manifeſtly intended as a check upon the ſupreme court, to prevent her from uſurping the power of the whole church, with which ſhe would otherwiſe have been inveſted, and from exerting it to ſerve the purpoſes of faction. The act of aſſembly, however, of 1711 never was tranſmitted to Preſbyteries for their conſideration. It was paſſed by the ſingle authority of the aſſembly, and in the moſt ſummary manner. This is an

indiſputable fact. It was, therefore, unconſtitutional from the beginning, and it is void at this hour. The ſame obſervation may be extended to the act of aſſembly of 1700, which rendered the formula of 1694, originally confined to epiſcopal clergymen, general in this kingdom. This act, as well as that of 1711, never had the requiſite tranſmiſſion, and is no more than a private enactment of a particular aſſembly. There is, therefore, no particular formula at preſent of any force in this church. The formula of 1694, indeed, contains little more than the act of parliament, and the church muſt have obliged us to ſubſcribe our approbation of the greater part of what it requires, though no ſuch formula had been deviſed. We can, therefore, only object to it as a conſtitution. But the act of 1711 is unconſtitutional and oppreſſive in every view. It invaded the rights of the civil legiſlature, it invades our rights as ſubjects, and our liberties as chriſtians; it is contrary to the conſtitutions of the church itſelf, and a manifeſt

uſurpa-

uſurpation of powers of which the general aſſembly had been formally deprived.

It is in vain to urge againſt evidence like this, that the barrier act was made to prevent innovations, that the act of 1711 introduced no innovations, and, therefore, required no tranſmiſſion. Admitting this to be the intention of the barrier act, who is to judge what are innovations? Is it the very court whom we would diſable from making them? Not an overture in this caſe, ſuppoſing it to be ſupported by a party ſufficiently powerful in our aſſembly, would ever be tranſmitted. No more would be neceſſary than to put the previous vote, whether it was an innovation; and the ſame perſons who advance the overture would determine the fact, and enact the law. Both would be the work of a day. In the preſent caſe, however, it has been already ſhewn that there are innovations, and of an important kind. If our doctrines remained the ſame after this epoch that they were before it, the original conſtitutions of our church concerning theſe

doctrines were materially altered. It would be equally vain to urge that the act we complain of has acquired the force of a law by preſcription. For on the one hand, we may obſerve that, in one light, preſcription can have no place in matters of religion. If the act was wrong at firſt, no length of time can render it right, or reconcile it to the conſcience. In another view, if by preſcription be meant that the whole church has, in fact, given a tacit aſſent to the juſtice of this act by an uninterrupted obedience, it is denied that there is any ſuch preſcription. Or tho' the defenders of the act could ſhew there was, and that it had been uniformly obeyed ſince the day on which it was enacted without a murmur; it would ſtill be neceſſary to enquire whether this ſilence was always the reſult of conviction, or proceeded from other cauſes.

But granting this act to be as conſtitutional as its defenders could wiſh it; granting that the general aſſembly may enact laws which create incapacities, and are enforced by penalties, without the autho-

rity

rity of the civil power, and contrary to the conſtitutions of the church; let us examine the act itſelf, and ſee what, in any reaſonable ſenſe, it can be underſtood to enjoin. For, rigorous as it is, I fear it is not a little indebted to its preſent defenders. The ſenſe they would impoſe upon us derives but little credit to the authors of the regulation. As men, the enactors of laws are, no doubt, liable to errors of judgment; but, in explaining their deciſions, where they require explanation, we muſt lay it down as a principle that they poſſeſſed ſentiment and reaſon like other human beings; and that, though zeal or paſſion might lead them into miſtakes, it could not deprive them of their common ſenſe, and make them utter manifeſt abſurdities.

As this ſubject has been already debated in one of our periodical papers, and as it may be ſuppoſed that the diſputants on both ſides omitted no argument which they thought could ſtrengthen their reſpective hypotheſes; I think I cannot better explain the preſent ſtate of ſubſcrip-

tion

tion in this kingdom, as well as the different ſentiments of our parties upon that point, than by giving a ſhort view of that debate. In doing this, I ſhall remark the miſtakes on both ſides, and endeavour, after comparing the different reaſonings which have been employed upon it, to ſtate the fact upon its proper principles.

That the public may ſee the foundation of this diſpute, and be better able to enter into the merits of the whole cauſe, I ſhall here extract that paſſage from Mr. Ferguſſon's letter where he ſpeaks of ſubſcription, and then tranſcribe his appendix.—After endeavouring to ſet his reverend brother right in ſome other points, he proceeds thus,

" I have been alſo told you ſaid you would pronounce them villains who had ſigned the Confeſſion of Faith, and did not believe every propoſition in it to be truth, and adhere to it as ſuch. This is a cenſure unworthy of a chriſtian, and far more unworthy a teacher of chriſtianity. I fancy you learned it from your leader; who has in a printed ſermon aſſerted

that

that we are not to think charitably of ſuch as have opinions or principles different from ours. The apoſtle Paul, who was a better divine than either of you, teaches a quite contrary doctrine, Rom. xiv. It plainly appears from your cenſure, you would deprive us of our natural right of private judgment, and the invaluable privilege of inquiring after truth, and of improving in the knowledge of it. This is to impoſe upon us the doctrine of implicit faith, one of the greateſt errors, and grand ſupports of popery. I aver that no man ought to ſign his aſſent and adherence to any human compoſure, but in ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures; which are the only rule of faith and manners; and not the opinions of men, let them be ever ſo learned, pious, and upright. And they that do ſo, act the ſafeſt and the upright part."

APPENDIX. *By the ſame hand.*

" Some of my brethren who got copies of this letter, wiſhed I had removed the objection

objection of diſhoneſty in ſubſcribing the Confeſſion of Faith, and not believing and adhering to every propoſition in it as truth. This ſet me to conſider what might be offered for that purpoſe; ſo I wrote them what follows. *1ſt*, No human government has a right to impoſe a ſubſcription in matters of faith and morals, to a compoſition of fallible men, but in ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcripture. *2dly*, Such an impoſition is inconſiſtent with, and deſtructive of the natural right of mankind to private judgment, freedom of enquiry after truth, and improvement in the knowledge of it. *3dly*, No man can diveſt himſelf of theſe rights, or of the exerciſe thereof, if he has any taſte of them: for they are inſeparable from his nature, as a creature made, among other noble purpoſes, to enquire after, and diſcover truth, and to judge for himſelf, that he may not be miſled by fallible men or ignorant teachers. *4thly*, As the ſcriptures are the only rule and ſtandard of faith and morals, no human compoſure ought to be put on an equal footing

ing with them; and no man who acts with conſcience will ſign the Confeſſion of Faith, or ſhould be thought to ſign it, but in ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures, though he do not at ſigning expreſs that qualification. *5thly*, It was with that qualification king James VI. and the nobility ſigned the firſt Confeſſion, as is to be ſeen in the laſt edition of it publiſhed at Glaſgow. *6thly*, The Weſtminſter aſſembly, ch. 31. § 4. acknowledge that all ſynods or councils, ſince the apoſtles, may err: ſure they did not claim infallibility, or intend that any ſhould ſubſcribe their compoſure, but in ſo far as it was agreeable to the ſcriptures. *7thly*, For theſe reaſons it is not to be imagined, that the parliament of 1690, when it enacted the ſubſcription of the Confeſſion, meant it as an uniformity in principle; a thing impoſſible; for men's minds are differently formed, and till God frame them all alike, they muſt view things differently: ſo they could only mean it as a teſt of conformity to the Preſbyterian eſtabliſhment." So far Mr. Ferguſſon.

Now, one would be apt, at firſt view, to think all this very juſt and reaſonable. A ſtranger to religious eſtabliſhments would not very eaſily be brought to ſee how any objections could well be made to it. If he were told that the author had been publickly charged with diſſimulation and perjury; that he had actually been proſecuted and harraſſed in church courts as an encourager of theſe vices, and on account of the above paragraphs; I queſtion much if he would be ſudden in giving credit to the fact. I think I ſee him inſiſting on it, that there cannot be an eſtabliſhment in the world founded upon principles ſo abſurd as to put it in any man's power to advance ſuch a charge.—The charge, however, has been advanced. It has been grounded too on the principles of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution, and on theſe principles *only* its ſupporters have rendered it plauſible. What ſtrange principles! how diſgraceful to an eſtabliſhment which calls itſelf proteſtant!

Before

Before I enter farther into this ſubject, I ſhall here premiſe two general obſervations upon the whole debate.

1*ſt*, Mr. Fergufſon and his antagoniſts do not ſeem to have proceeded upon *common* principles. It is remarkable that in Mr. Fergufſon's whole account of ſubſcription, as contained in the above extracts, there is not one word of the Formula, nor the moſt diſtant alluſion which could induce us to think that ſuch a conſtitution exiſted. His argument relates merely to ſubſcribing the Confeſſion. This forces me to think that Mr. Fergufſon, knowing the Formula to be unconſtitutional, conſidered it as null, and undeſerving of any notice. On the other hand, his anſwerers proceed univerſally upon the ſuppoſition that it is in force, and draw their keeneſt concluſions from this ſource. This conduct, if it was intentional, is unfair. I do not, however, aſſert that it was intentional. It is ſufficient for my purpoſe to obſerve that, previous to any reaſonings upon the ſubject, this point ought to have been mutually determined;

determined; becauſe the determination of it either way produces a material difference in the argument. The principal ſubject in debate was, "Whether a man might not ſubſcribe the Confeſſion of Faith with this qualification, ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures?" The orthodox party, proceeding upon the foundation of the Formula, inſiſted, and, in my opinion, ſucceſsfully, that this clauſe reduced the ſubſcription to downright nonſenſe. It was, in other words, declaring that he believed the Confeſſion to be agreeable to the ſcriptures ſo far as it was agreeable. Here, therefore, they triumphed; and, indeed, grant them their principle, their triumph was certainly well founded. They reflected not that Mr. Ferguſſon, in any part of his letter or appendix, had not ſaid one word about the Formula. Now, upon the ſuppoſition that he thought it null, and that he reſtricted his ſenſe of ſubſcription to the Confeſſion itſelf, which we have all the reaſon in the world from his own words to think he did, this alters the argument entirely.

entirely. In this caſe the abſurdity vaniſhes at once. A man may undoubtedly ſubſcribe the Confeſſion ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures; that is, he may declare, without any abſurdity, that he approves of it in general, though he cannot aſſent to every particular propoſition. There is no nonſenſe in this. On the contrary, it is a very rational, intelligible ſubſcription; and, I will venture to ſay, after all the duſt which has been raiſed, is the only ſubſcription which a proteſtant ought to make.

2*dly*, Mr. Ferguſſon's defenders, who ſaw not this miſtake, and who endeavoured to ſhew that ſubſcription in this ſenſe was rational even upon the foundation of the Formula, have, in company with the other party, fallen into an error of another kind. The Formula of 1711 conſiſts of two parts, or rather contains two requiſitions,—a declaration of preſent belief, and a promiſe of future adherence. Theſe two requiſitions are ſo different, that a propoſition may be true with regard to one of them which is not

true with regard to the other. Now the error into which both parties have fallen is this. They have confounded theſe two different parts of ſubſcription together, and transferred the concluſions which ariſe only from one to both. By this means both parties are, at the ſame time, both right and wrong: both refute, and both demonſtrate; and this ſingle miſtake is the ſource of infinite confuſion. This remark will be confirmed by attending to the hiſtory.

The propoſition which Mr. Ferguſſon wanted to eſtabliſh appears to be this, "That a man may ſubſcribe the Confeſſion of Faith without diſhoneſty, though he do not, at the time of his ſubſcription, *believe*, nor afterwards *adhere to*, every article which it contains."—This propoſition, when the expreſſion is rendered more accurate, is, in reality, two propoſitions, and comprehends two diſtinct aſſertions. 1*ſt*, That a man may, without any diſhoneſty, ſubſcribe the Confeſſion of Faith, though he does not believe every article of it at the time of

his ſubſcription. 2*dly*, That a man who ſubſcribes the Confeſſion of Faith, and believes every article of it at the time of his ſubſcription, may afterwards, without diſhoneſty, depart from ſome articles of his ſubſcription upon conviction. Theſe two propoſitions, though very different, he involves, inadvertently, in one, and attempts to prove them by the ſame chain of reaſoning. The deduction he employs proves the firſt *only* upon ſuppoſition that the Formula of 1711 is out of the queſtion; it proves the laſt, even granting that Formula to be legal, and is deciſive in every light. The debate opens gradually. Let us attend to it.

Mr. Fergusſon ſupports his propoſition upon the following foundation,—"That every ſubſcription to a human ſtandard is, upon proteſtant principles, and in the nature of things, a qualified ſubſcription; and, therefore, ſo far as this qualification is underſtood to go, there can be no diſhoneſty in the tranſaction, even though the qualification itſelf, at the time of ſubſcribing, ſhould not be ex-

preſſed by the ſubſcriber."—His ideas upon this point appear to me to be theſe. *Diſſimulation* is a relative word: it ſuppoſes two parties; a *deceiver*, and a party *deceived*, or meant to be *deceived*. It is the ſame caſe with *mental reſervation*, in the bad ſenſe of that phraſe. It always ſuppoſes intentional deception in the one party, whether it take effect or not. Now, Mr. Ferguſſon thinks that, in his ſenſe of ſubſcription, there neither *can* be, nor is there in *fact*, any diſſimulation, any mental reſervation. There is not any deception, there cannot be any intention of deception, nor any occaſion for it in this affair; becauſe the two parties proceed upon common principles. Theſe principles are—that *private judgment* is one of thoſe natural rights of which we *cannot*, even though we were willing, diveſt ourſelves: that the *ſcripture* is the only infallible ſtandard of faith and morals: that, therefore, it cannot be the meaning of any act of parliament or aſſembly, which enjoins ſubſcription to a human ſtandard, that we ſhould diveſt ourſelves

of

of this right, or give up this principle: and, finally, that no man in his ſenſes can think that this is the meaning of ſuch act. When a man, therefore, ſubſcribes the Confeſſion, he always does it, he is always actually thought to do it, with theſe *ſavings*; and he cannot, even though he were inclined, ſubſcribe it in any other ſenſe, nor can any body actually think he does, even though they were inclined to require it.—Such is the train of Mr. Ferguſſon's reaſoning as laid down in the firſt four propoſitions of his appendix. Theſe propoſitions are not, it muſt be confeſſed, expreſſed with all the accuracy requiſite; but theſe appear to have been his ideas. The remaining three propoſitions are only ſupporters of theſe, or conſequences from them.

The principles upon which Mr. Ferguſſon here proceeds are undoubtedly juſt. Every ſubſcription, at leaſt every proteſtant ſubſcription, is certainly thus qualified. Private judgment is the unalienable right of every man, and the paramount authority of the ſcriptures is a

principle eſſential to every proteſtant. Every proteſtant ſubſcription muſt, therefore, be, in *fact*, made with theſe *ſavings*. But then the queſtion is, how far theſe *ſavings* go in the preſent argument? Do they carry us to the *whole* of Mr. Ferguſſon's concluſion? Let us ſee what his antagoniſts ſay to it.

But here, before I engage with theſe writers, I muſt beg leave to enter a caveat. I mean only to anſwer their * arguments. In

* I cannot, however, for my own ſake, avoid adding a note here. I believe I may ſafely affirm that there never was ſuch *language* made uſe of in ſuch a debate before as that which Mr. Ferguſſon's antagoniſts employed on this occaſion. The public will probably be ſufficiently ſhocked at a few extracts from ſome of their performances. Says one, ſpeaking of Mr. Ferguſſon,—"What ſort of conſcience this man hath, may be learned from his appendix; how far he hath made ſhipwreck concerning the faith, may be learned from the letter to which it is ſubjoined." In another place, alluding to an aſſertion of Mr. Ferguſſon about ſyſtem-reading,—"Theſe words," ſays he, "*ſyſtems*, and *ſyſtematic divines* and *divinity*, are words, which, uttered very contemptuouſly and ſuperciliouſly by artful corrupt men, have made ſtrange work, in our times, among corrupt unlearned perſons

In their reaſonings on this ſubject, they bend their main force againſt the firſt

ſons and blockheads." Another of them ſays,—"Such an aſſertion (viz. that a man may ſubſcribe the Confeſſion, without diſhoneſty, and yet not believe and adhere *to every* propoſition in it as truth) muſt, I am certain, appear to all the unprejudiced, as an inſult done the common ſenſe and judgment of mankind, and as a piece of impudence and effrontery unworthy, not only of a miniſter of the goſpel, but of any man of common honeſty." Again,—"The vindication of his own conduct (how could he know that?) lays him under the cruel neceſſity of patronizing deceit and perfidy. But without doubt he carries his villany to a moſt enormous pitch, when he dares load the memory of the worthy members of the Scotch parliament at the revolution with ſo heavy an imputation." The imputation was, that they meant the Confeſſion only as a teſt of conformity to the Preſbyterian eſtabliſhment. To add no more—"I readily excuſe Mr. Douglas," ſays he, "for this unfair and injurious account of the matter, becauſe, &c. But, alas! I cannot make the ſame excuſe for her own faithleſs and perjured ſon." What an amiable writer have we here? Had he ſet out in the ludicrous walk, ſome liberty as a ſatyriſt might have been allowed him; but to tell a man ſeriouſly that he is a villain, becauſe he differs from *him* about the meaning of ſubſcription—deſerves penal correction. It is evidently a matter which falls under the notice of the court of commiſſary. I ſhall, therefore, ſay no more of it.

part of Mr. Ferguſſon's concluſion. His fourth propoſition is this.—"As the ſcriptures are the only rule and and ſtandard of faith and morals, no human compoſure ought to be put on a footing with them; and no man who acts with conſcience will ſign the Confeſſion of Faith, or ſhould be thought to ſign it, but in ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures, though he do not at ſigning expreſs that qualification." Neglecting its connection with the reſt, this propoſition ſeems to be ſingled out, and marked for a victim. The ſubſtance of what they advance may be reduced within a ſhort compaſs. They argue that the requiring an abſolute ſubſcription to a human compoſition is not putting that compoſition on a footing with the ſcriptures; that, with a qualification of the ſort contended for, one might ſign the canons of the council of Trent, Pope Pius's creed, or the Turkiſh Coran: that ſuch a qualification reduces the ſubſcription to an abſolute abſurdity: and, laſtly, to ſhew that this is not, in fact, the preſent ſenſe of ſubſcription

tion

tion in this church, they quote the Formula.

I agree with the gentlemen that Mr. Ferguſſon's principles will not carry him to the *whole* of what he wants to eſtabliſh. The right of private judgment, and the paramount authority of the ſcriptures, are perfectly conſiſtent with declaring what our private judgment concerning the ſcriptures is. The requiring that ſuch a declaration be emitted in a particular way, under the pain of penalties if it be not, is, indeed, inconſiſtent with the *exerciſe* of private judgment, but not with the exiſtence of the right itſelf. Such a requiſition is a hardſhip, but implies no abſurdity. A declaration of this kind may, therefore, be emitted, and every body underſtand it to be abſolute. Now, ſuch a declaration is the Formula. I will grant farther, that, taking the Formula into the account, the ſubſcribing the Confeſſion through this medium, ſo far as it regards the preſent ſentiments of the ſubſcriber, is inconſiſtent with the notion of a qualified ſubſcription, and

reduces

reduces it to an abſurdity. But then, I ſtill inſiſt upon two points.

1ſt, I ſay, that ſetting the Formula aſide, the ſubſcription of the Confeſſion with this qualification, viz. "ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures," is a rational ſubſcription. I go farther. I ſay that this was in effect the ſubſcription uſed in our church until the act of 1711. I go farther ſtill. I inſiſt upon it that this mode of ſubſcription, conſidered in itſelf, is the only ſubſcription which is agreeable to the proteſtant foundation; and that the introduction of the Formula, which excludes this mode of ſubſcription, was a departure from the principles of the reformation.

2dly, I inſiſt upon it that the right of private judgment, and the paramount authority of the ſcriptures, which are the principles Mr. Ferguſſon goes upon, eſtabliſh the ſecond part of his concluſion, even upon the foundation of the Formula, in the fulleſt manner, and are totally inconſiſtent with that promiſe of adherence

the

the breach of which infers diſhoneſty in the ſubſcriber.

I ſay that, ſetting the Formula aſide, the ſubſcription of the Confeſſion with this qualification is a rational ſubſcription. The only difference between the two modes of ſubſcription is, that the one is a *general*, and the other a *particular* ſubſcription. The difference is material in another view, but both are equally rational. Mr. Ferguſſon's anſwerers aſſert that, with this qualification, one might ſign the canons of the council of Trent, Pope Pius's creed, or the Turkiſh Coran. This is but a quibble, and unworthy of a ſerious refutation. Theſe writers knew very well, and their party knew, that, when we ſay we ſubſcribe the Confeſſion ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures, we mean that we ſubſcribe our approbation of the Confeſſion as agreeable to the ſcriptures in *general*, though we do not think that every *particular* propoſition of it is ſo. This is the ſentiment, and every body perfectly underſtands it. To give it any other ſenſe is

to

to take advantage of words, and ſubſtitute a ſtrong expreſſion for an argument of the underſtanding. This is the jeſuitical conduct. It is you, my brethren! who have, in the preſent inſtance, availed yourſelves of the latitude of language. We adhere to the argument. — This, however, is the only ſubſcription which the church of Scotland originally required from her miniſters. From the revolution to the year 1711, it was a general ſubſcription. If this were not already ſufficiently evident from the foregoing hiſtory of our Confeſſion, we may aſk, what was the meaning of introducing a ſubſcription more particular? If the anxious guardians of our ancient doctrines did not think the former Formula of ſubſcription general, to what purpoſe introduce a new one which differs from the old, ſo far as it regards theſe doctrines, in no viſible circumſtance but this, that it is expreſſed in terms ſo preciſe and rigid as are inconſiſtent with the idea of a mere general approbation.

People

People may reaſon to any length upon the plaineſt ſubjects, and involve them in obſcurity. Abandon facts, and there is no end of the ſubtlety of diſtinctions. The province of ideas has, in all ages, been the region of univerſal monarchy; and we may extend our trophies there to any limits. In a ſerious diſpute, let us attend to things, and reſt our concluſions upon facts.— I ſay that, by impoſing a particular ſubſcription to a human ſtandard, we have departed from the proteſtant foundation; and that the introduction of the Formula of 1711 has taken away the diſtinction between the churches of Scotland and of Rome. For what is this diſtinction? And on what was it founded? Was it not founded on this principle, that the church of Rome, by requiring implicit ſubmiſſion to her deciſions, had raiſed them to a level with the ſcriptures? From this error proceeded the other conſequences in a train. For, by inſiſting that many paſſages of ſcripture admitted various ſenſes, which is, no doubt, true; and by impoſing her own interpretation upon

upon us uniformly as the juſt one; ſhe found means, on every occaſion when ſhe judged it convenient, to ſet the ſcriptures aſide, till at laſt we had a different religion. And what has the church of Scotland, in effect, done leſs? She denies, indeed, in words, that ſhe conſiders her confeſſion as of equal authority with the ſcriptures; yet ſhe impoſes it upon her members as if it was. She acknowledges that ſhe is liable to error, and may have erred; yet ſhe inſiſts upon it that, in fact, ſhe has not erred, and we find the conſequences to be the ſame to *us* as if ſhe openly aſſerted her own infallibility. Not contented with requiring an approbation of her judgment in general, which is ever the firſt ſtep of a bluſhing eſtabliſhment, ſhe is dazzled with the ſplendour of the error ſhe combats, and becomes at laſt as poſitive as her antagoniſt. At the ſame time, while ſhe is as poſitive as to the fact, the inconſiſtency of her conduct with her principles renders her infinitely more ridiculous. The church of Rome maintains that her deciſions are juſt, be-

cauſe

cauſe the authority which iſſues them is infallible. She has not erred, becauſe ſhe cannot err. The church of Scotland acknowledges her fallibility, and, at the ſame time, aſſerts her actual rectitude. She hardily inſiſts upon it that ſhe is right in every point, while with the ſame breath ſhe acknowledges that ſhe may be wrong in all. Which of the two churches is moſt conſiſtent? I may aſk, which of them is moſt honeſt? The one who acts the deed and avows the principle, or the one who acts the ſame deed and diſowns it? You deny that you put your confeſſion on the ſame footing with the ſcriptures; but tell me what it is you require to the ſcriptures which you do not require to your confeſſion? You require us to acknowledge the ſcriptures to be the truths of God, and do not you require the ſame acknowledgment concerning your confeſſion? You diſavow the principles of the church of Rome, and modeſtly decline the title of infallible; but where lies the difference, with reſpect to *us*, whether you aſſert that you are always in the right,

or that you never can be wrong? You require us to believe all your opinions;—what does the church of Rome do more? But we burn no Heretics. Indeed! the indulgence is certainly well-timed, and Hereties would, no doubt, be infinitely indebted to your humanity if the difference between burning and ſtarving were a difference of much conſequence. It is not *you*, however, whom we have to thank even for *this* favour. Your range is limited by the civil power. The church of Rome exceeds not this boundary, and no religious eſtabliſhment has ever fallen ſhort of it. What you can, you do. You brand with infamy whoever preſumes to differ from yourſelves, you deprive him of his emoluments, and expoſe him to pine in poverty. When you have done this, you ſay you give him no further trouble. But the church of Rome goes beyond you ſtill, and carries her tender mercies a ſtep farther. She commits him to the flames, and puts an end to his miſery.

But I wrong the church of Scotland. She is not ſo cruelly culpable, for ſhe has

made no ſuch abſurd requiſitions. I am loading her with the tyrannical impoſitions of a particular aſſembly, and with the conduct of a particular ſet of men, who proceed upon theſe impoſitions as conſtitutional. I have already ſhewn that the act of 1711, which impoſes a particular ſubſcription to her articles, is not the deed of the church, and that her members may reject it. Mr. Ferguſſon, therefore, when he contends for a general ſubſcription, contends for the only ſubſcription which is legal; and, when he ſays there is no neceſſity for a ſubſcriber expreſly to declare that this is his ſenſe of it, he ſays that it is ſuperfluous to inform the church of the nature of her own ſubſcription. A general approbation of her doctrines is all that law requires; and, ſetting aſide an unconſtitutional act, is all that any ſubſcriber can be underſtood to give. The defenders of orthodoxy proceed univerſally upon a wrong foundation. They confound the original intention of confeſſions with the definitions which they themſelves, after abuſing

them from their proper purpoſe, find it neceſſary to invent in order to defend their own meaſures. Thus, ſays one of the writers on this occaſion, "It was certainly the end and aim of confeſſions conceived in words different from the very words of ſcripture, to diſtinguiſh the different ſects and denominations of chriſtians from one another, and to fix and aſcertain the different ſenſes they put upon the ſcriptures, on which all of them pretend to found their different opinions, and to which all appeal for the truth of them." And, having laid down this definition as a principle, he infers by neceſſary conſequence, —"but, by ſigning them with the above qualification, it is evident this end muſt be effectually defeated." The defeat, however, falls only upon his argument. For, if a ſubſcription thus qualified be the only ſubſcription which can be reconciled to proteſtant principles, his definition is, ipſo facto, cut to pieces. Indeed it muſt periſh of itſelf, and fall into ruin by its own weight, without any other oppoſition. For it could not have been the original

original intention of Confeſſions to diſtinguiſh the different denominations of chriſtians from one another, becauſe it is a fact that this is not the means by which they are diſtinguiſhed. All the Confeſſions of the different reformed churches contain eſſentially the ſame ſyſtem of doctrines; and you could not, by comparing the Thirty-nine Articles with the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, be able, ſo far as the doctrine is concerned, to diſtinguiſh the church of England from the church of Scotland.—The truth of the propoſition, therefore, which Mr. Fergusſon wanted to eſtabliſh, viz. "that a man may, without any diſhoneſty, ſubſcribe the Confeſſion of Faith though he does not believe every article of it at the time of his ſubſcription," depends upon the nature of the ſubſcription itſelf. If it be a particular ſubſcription, or, which is the ſame thing, if the Formula of 1711 be admitted as legal, this propoſition is undoubtedly excluded. But if the ſubſcription be general, and that Formula be ſet aſide as of no force; which is Mr. Fergusſon's ſenſe of it, and which is the

church's ſenſe of it; then it is evident that a man may, without diſhoneſty, ſubſcribe the Confeſſion though he believes not every article. The propoſition itſelf, indeed, is in that caſe, but a different way of defining the ſubſcription.

Mr. Fergusſon's anſwerers have ſet out wrong. They have not anſwered him upon his own principles. But they have committed another miſtake ſtill more capital. For, after having, upon *their* principles, overthrown his firſt propoſition, they transfer their concluſion, without ceremony, to the ſecond. They take it for granted that the fate of the firſt involves the ſecond, and that preſent belief is eſtabliſhed upon the ſame principles with future adherence. His defenders have fallen into the ſame error.

But here the cauſe of moderation is triumphant. The principles upon which Mr. Fergusſon proceeds reach this part of ſubſcription with the fulleſt evidence. Granting the Formula of 1711 to be ever ſo conſtitutional, let us ſee what any man of common reaſon and judgment can underſtand

derſtand it to require. This Formula conſiſts of two parts;—a declaration of preſent belief, and a promiſe of future adherence. Concerning the firſt, I mean not to diſpute. It may be oppreſſive, but ſtill it is intelligible; and I am not ſufficiently zealous to pronounce every thing abſurd which is inconſiſtent with proteſtant principles. But the ſecond admits rather more ſpeculation; not ſo much on account of its own obſcurity, as the concluſions of its ſupporters, which have reduced it to an abſurdity.—According to them, a man who ſubſcribes the Formula, and who afterwards departs from any point of his ſubſcription, is guilty of diſſimulation and perjury. Nay, gentlemen! you have aſſerted this in the moſt poſitive manner, and you will find it now too late to recede. On what other foundation could you pretend to charge Mr. Ferguſſon with theſe vices? You had no aſſurance that he himſelf had ſubſcribed opinions which he did not believe, and you could only charge him, even upon ſuppoſition that the ſentiments advanced in

his letter were heretical, with having departed from his original ſubſcription. We have already diſcuſſed the firſt part of his propoſition, and ſhall not reſume it. The ſecond point which he wanted to eſtabliſh was, — "that a man who ſubſcribed the Confeſſion of Faith, and believed every article of it at the time of his ſubſcription, may afterwards, without diſhoneſty, depart from ſome articles of his ſubſcription upon conviction." This you deny in bulk, and attempt to ſhew it is impoſſible. The principles on which our concluſion is eſtabliſhed are — *the right of private judgment*, and *the paramount authority of the ſcriptures*. We contend that every ſubſcription is, in fact, made with theſe *ſavings*; and that there is even no occaſion for expreſſing this at the time of ſubſcription, becauſe it is equally underſtood by both parties. You allow the premiſes, and deny the conſequence. This denial you ſupport upon the obligation of *adherence*. Let us ſee what the meaning of this obligation is, and let us determine it by your own conceſſions.

ceſſions. It is evident, then, that when a man promiſes to adhere to theſe opinions, he promiſes not, he cannot promiſe, he cannot be underſtood by any body to promiſe, that he will continue to believe them. The right of private judgment comes in here, and is applied in all its latitude. Such a promiſe, either given or underſtood to be given, would reduce this part of the ſubſcription to an abſurdity. Such a promiſe is inconſiſtent, not only with the *exerciſe*, but with the very *exiſtence* of private judgment; it outrages our common ſenſe, and ſubverts the whole human conſtitution.—Let us take up the argument in another light. The principles upon which it proceeds may be reduced to two propoſitions. *1ſt*, No ſociety can mean, nor, in fact, do mean, by any act whatever, to take away a *natural right* from an individual; and no individual ever can, nor ever, in fact, does diveſt himſelf of ſuch a right. *2dly*, In the particular inſtance of ſubſcription, this is equally underſtood by both parties; and, conſequently, ſo far as it applies in

this caſe there can be no diſſimulation.—Now it applies, in the directeſt manner, to the clauſe of adherence. When we promiſe to adhere to the opinions we then ſubſcribe, it is impoſſible we can be underſtood to promiſe, it is impoſſible that we ourſelves can think we promiſe, to continue to believe theſe opinions. Our ſubſcription can never, in fact, be underſtood in this ſenſe, either by the ſubſcriber himſelf, or by thoſe who require his ſubſcription; becauſe this would be, on *their* part, to require him, and, on *his* part, actually to promiſe to diveſt himſelf of one of thoſe *natural rights* which can never, in fact, either be alienated, or be thought to be alienated. Neither party can underſtand the affair in this ſenſe. This *right* muſt always be underſtood, by both ſides, as reſerved in *futuro*. Every particular ſubſcription muſt, in its own nature, be thus qualified; and there is no occaſion to expreſs this qualification, becauſe it is intuitively evident. There can be no diſſimulation in this caſe. The one party cannot, in fact, be deceived; the

the other party can neither actually deceive, nor ſo much as intend to deceive; becauſe ſuch intention would be wholly idle in every reſpect.—This is the fact, and it is no leſs evident from reaſon antecedent to fact. It undoubtedly was never the intention of the makers of our laws to require our promiſe to perform an impoſſibility. But if, by requiring us to adhere to the opinions we ſubſcribe, they meant to take our promiſe that we would continue to believe theſe opinions, they, in fact, require us to perform a thing which is impoſſible. This, therefore, can never be the meaning of our ſubſcription. The enactors of it themſelves could not make, they could never be thought to make ſuch a requiſition.

But ſuch a promiſe is not only inconſiſtent with the right of private judgment; it is equally inconſiſtent with that authority which, as proteſtants, we aſcribe to the ſcriptures.—Mr. Ferguſſon's defenders have endeavoured to ſhew that the whole ſubſcription, as defined by the Formula of 1711, if underſtood to be an abſolute

abſolute ſubſcription, is irreconcileable with that authority, and implies an inconſiſtency. This is extending to the whole ſubſcription what is ſtrictly true only of a part. I grant theſe gentlemen that the firſt part of our ſubſcription, that which requires us to declare that we believe the *whole* doctrine contained in our Confeſſion to be the truth of God, and agreeable to the ſcriptures, is a departure from the principles upon which we ſeparated from the church of Rome, and, conſidered in its conſequences, cannot be reconciled to them. But the inconſiſtency I mean here implies a contradiction. The firſt part of our ſubſcription implies not an inconſiſtency in this ſenſe. It may be called inconſiſtent in general language; but, in ſtrictneſs of ſpeech, it leads to no direct contradiction; and, though full of oppreſſion, it may ſtill, upon popiſh principles, be ſhewn to be rational.—But the ſecond part of our ſubſcription, if it be underſtood to mean a promiſe by which we engage to continue to believe the ſame opinions, implies an inconſiſtency

of

of the groſſeſt nature. It is inconſiſtent with a clauſe in the book itſelf which we ſubſcribe; and, conſequently, if admitted, reduces us to ſubſcribe two contrary propoſitions. It is inconſiſtent with the great principle on which every proteſtant church profeſſes to ſtand; and, conſequently, would force us to ſubſcribe, and profeſs, the moſt oppoſite principles.

As this point of inconſiſtency has been warmly conteſted by the writers of the other party, and that the public may ſee how ſimple the affair is; I ſhall here name the two inconſiſtent propoſitions which we are obliged, upon this hypotheſis, to ſubſcribe, or profeſs to believe.

One of the articles which we ſubſcribe is, "That all councils and ſynods are fallible;" and, conſequently, that the tenets which we *now* ſubſcribe may, for any thing we certainly know to the contrary, be falſe. The two inconſiſtent propoſitions which we ſubſcribe here are—

1*ſt*, I believe that the opinions I now ſubſcribe *may* be falſe.

2*dly*, I

2*dly*, I believe that the opinions I now ſubſcribe *cannot* be falſe; inaſmuch as they are the infallible truths of God, to which I will, through divine grace, adhere to my laſt moments.

Or take it thus. The great principle upon which the proteſtants ſeparated from the church of Rome, and on which we ſtill profeſs to ſtand, is,—"That the ſcripture is the only infallible ſtandard of religious opinion." The two inconſiſtent propoſitions here are—

1*ſt*, I believe that the ſcripture is the *only* infallible ſtandard of religious opinion.

2*dly*, I believe that the Confeſſion of Faith is *alſo* an infallible ſtandard; this being the only ſuppoſition upon which a man can promiſe an invariable adherence to the tenets either of the one or of the other.

From this whole ſtate of the caſe, then, it appears that both parties have puſhed this argument too far. When accurately propoſed, it ſtands thus.—Our *whole* ſubſcription, in the orthodox ſenſe of it, implies

plies an inconſiſtency,—but not in both its parts. There is no inconſiſtency between theſe two propoſitions,—"the acknowledging the ſcriptures to be the only infallible ſtandard of religious belief, and the declaring that we believe the Confeſſion to be agreeable to the ſcriptures." But there is a manifeſt inconſiſtency between theſe,—"the acknowledging the ſcriptures to be the only infallible ſtandard of religious belief, and the promiſing an invariable adherence to any other ſtandard." Our ſubſcription can, therefore, imply no ſuch engagement. We can never give, we can never be underſtood to give, a promiſe that we will continue to believe the ſame opinions; and, if this be granted, Mr. Ferguſſon's ſecond propoſition is demonſtrated.

But the defenders of eſtabliſhment may endeavour to ſupport their concluſion by putting ſtill another ſenſe upon the clauſe of adherence. They may alledge that it means an engagement to abide by the articles ſubſcribed while the ſubſcriber continues in the church; in other words, that

that it is an engagement to leave the church as ſoon as his ſentiments come to be different from the tenets he ſubſcribes *.

Convicted of the abſurdity of the former ſenſe of this part of ſubſcription, though it be the more obvious one, and the only ſenſe, indeed, upon which ſome of their uncharitable concluſions can be defended; I am ſenſible that the orthodox party will fix upon this meaning, and contend that it is the juſt one. This is only, however, at bottom, a ſofter method of ſtating the ſame caſe. If the firſt ſenſe be abſurd, ſo muſt this. The ſame arguments annihilate both. Both theſe ſenſes of the clauſe proceed upon the ſame principles, and the laſt is even loaded with additional difficulties.

For, in the 1ſt place, we make this direct anſwer. There is no ſuch engagement, no ſuch obligation expreſſed in the ſubſcription itſelf. We engage to adhere to theſe opinions, we engage to maintain and defend them, we engage never to

* In this caſe, however, what becomes of their charge of diſſimulation and perjury?

endeavour

endeavour the prejudice and ſubverſion of them. But we do not engage to leave the church when we ceaſe to believe them. If any clergyman thinks he cannot continue in the communion of the church when her articles of faith become different from ſome of his private ſentiments, he may leave it from a principle of conſcience; but he is under no obligation to leave it from his public engagements. The leaving the church as ſoon as he ceaſes to believe any of her tenets, is no part of his duty as a miniſter. It was no term of his admiſſion, nor does he continue to hold his office upon any ſuch condition.

2*dly*, The putting this ſenſe upon the clauſe is departing from the plaineſt meaning of words, and would render all language uncertain. It alters the very nature of the clauſe itſelf, and makes it an entirely different propoſition. According to this hypotheſis it would be, not an engagement to adhere, but an engagement to do ſomething elſe after we have broke our engagement of adherence.

This

This is an entirely different caſe, and, if there be any depending upon the common rules of language, it is a caſe for which our Formula has made no proviſion.

3*dly*, Another proof that the Formula has made no proviſion for this caſe may be the following. The clauſes of adherence, as expreſſed in the Formula of 1711 and in that of 1694, are materially the ſame; and, conſequently, we may conclude that both muſt be explained by the ſame rules of interpretation, and contain the ſame ſanctions. But our church was ſo far from thinking that the clauſe of adherence in the Formula of 1694 meant an engagement to leave the church as ſoon as the ſentiments of the ſubſcriber became different in any point from the tenets ſubſcribed, and, conſequently, that this was a caſe already provided for; that, in the year 1696, ſhe made a new act, taking particular cogniſance of this caſe as if it had been ſtill entire, and reſtricting the penalty to an arbitrary puniſhment. It is there appointed, "That

all who vented any opinion contrary unto, or inconſiſtent with the Confeſſion of Faith, or any article, part, or propoſition therein, be cenſured by the church *according to their demerit.*" If the Formula itſelf had included an engagement, on the part of the ſubſcriber, that, in ſuch an event, he would leave the church, there would have been no occaſion for making a new act; or, if ſuch an act had been ſtill thought neceſſary, it would, at leaſt, have been enforced with the original penalty included in the Formula. This is not done. What is equally remarkable, the penalty provided by this act is leſs than that which the orthodox contend is included in the Formula. In the Formula, according to them, the penalty is definite and poſitive; in the act of 1696, it is indefinite and diſcretionary. It is not very probable, however, that the intention of this act was to mitigate the Formula. It is more natural to think that the deſign of it was to improve upon that obligation, and to render the terms of miniſterial communion ſtill more rigid.

In this light it ſupplied a deficiency in that ſubſcription, and ſerved to explain a caſe for which the church had not till then provided. There may alſo a reaſon be aſſigned why this caſe was not provided for in the Formula, and why it was provided for now. At the time of paſſing the Formula act, the tendency to hereſy might not have appeared ſo formidable as to draw much attention; but, as knowledge ſpread, and the danger to orthodoxy increaſed, the guardians of eſtabliſhment would gradually find it neceſſary to take the matter into conſideration, and to adopt ſuch meaſures as were calculated to ſtop its progreſs. Hence we are furniſhed with a reaſon why every ſucceeding act of the church in ſupport of orthodoxy is ſeverer than the preceding, from the revolution to the year 1711, when the laſt ſtroke was given to our religious liberties. —If this be denied, and it be inſiſted on that this act was meant merely to revive and enforce the Formula act; I aſk how it comes to have all the appearance of a new act? How comes the Formula not to

to be once mentioned in it, no more than any other deed of the church which has no connection with it? It is uſual in a poſterior act, which merely inforces a prior one, to refer us to the prior act itſelf, and to ſecure its contents, unleſs in the caſe of a deficiency, by the former penalties. Or, if there be a deficiency, and ſtronger ſanctions are judged neceſſary, it confirms the old ones, and makes additions. It would be a new way of enforcing an act to take away part of the penalty.—If the caſe of a miniſter who vented any opinion inconſiſtent with his original ſubſcription had been provided for by the Formula, and the clauſe of adherence contained in our ſubſcription, had meant an engagement, in ſuch an event, to leave the church; the act of 1696, inſtead of appointing him to be cenſured *according to his demerit*, would have appointed him to be cenſured as directed by the act of 1694, and in terms of his ſubſcription *. That is, it would have appointed

* It is no objection to the argument contained in this article that the Formula of 1694 was not made

pointed him to be expelled from the church. This is certainly the moſt natural ſuppoſition. But the fact is, the Aſſembly of 1696 have not only provided for a particular caſe as if it had not been provided for before, and named a penalty as if no penalty had hitherto been named; but they have named a penalty different from what the orthodox party contend was named. They have not diſcharged miniſters to vent opinions inconſiſtent with their ſubſcription upon pain of being obliged to leave the church. They have referred the puniſhment, in ſuch a caſe, to the diſcretion of the church herſelf. Here, then, is an argument in point. The orthodox contend that the

general in this church until the year 1700. It was extended to at leaſt a part of our clergy two years before the act of 1696; and that act comprehended thoſe to whom it was extended as well as the reſt. Beſides, the clauſe of adherence itſelf had been adminiſtered, though not by this Formula, to *all* our clergy from the revolution. This clauſe, therefore, whether in the Formula or act of parliament, could not comprehend the caſe for which the act of 1696 made proviſion.

Formula annexes a particular, poſitive penalty to a particular tranſgreſſion. The church, in a ſubſequent deed, has decided this in the negative, by annexing a diſcretionary penalty to the ſame tranſgreſſion. The defenders of orthodoxy are, therefore, here reduced to a dilemma. If they ſay that the caſe for which the act of 1696 provides was provided for in the Formula, then that act muſt have been intended either to mitigate the Formula, to render it more rigid, or merely to explain it. If it was meant to mitigate the Formula, then the clauſe of adherence, even granting it to have originally included an obligation to leave the church upon a change of ſentiment, no longer includes that obligation. If it was meant to render it more rigid, then that obligation was never in the Formula, and the clauſe of adherence could not originally have had that meaning which is now contended for. If it was merely meant to explain the Formula, the ſame concluſion follows. This reaſoning applies equally to both Formulas. The

clauſe of adherence is the ſame in both. That clauſe, therefore, cannot be underſtood to mean an engagement to leave the church upon a change of ſentiment. The act of 1696 is to be regarded as the ſenſe of the church in this matter, and this act includes no ſuch penalty.

4thly, One part of the clauſe itſelf is utterly inconſiſtent with this ſenſe. We promiſe, "never to endeavour the prejudice or ſubverſion of theſe opinions." But our leaving the church when we ceaſe to believe theſe opinions, is, in fact, to ſet ourſelves in oppoſition to them, and to endeavour their ſubverſion. The clauſe, therefore, if taken in this ſenſe, would be a contradiction in terms.

5thly, But the orthodox, if they give up the firſt ſenſe of this clauſe, viz. that it is a promiſe to continue to believe the ſame opinions, ought, for the ſame reaſons, to give up this, becauſe it proceeds upon the ſame principles, and is chargeable with the very ſame abſurdities. I could wiſh to illuſtrate this diſtinctly, and to convince the orthodox themſelves that

that the foundation on which they proceed is hollow. I would, therefore, addreſs this argument to *them* particularly. —It will be allowed, then, by the greateſt ſticklers among them, that thoſe who at firſt deviſed and impoſed this clauſe underſtood the intention of it as well as any of their ſucceſſors. I believe the moſt zealous advocate of eſtabliſhment will be willing to abide by their ſenſe of it. Now, it is very plain to me that even the firſt impoſers of it never could mean it as an engagement by which every ſubſcriber bound himſelf to leave the church as ſoon as his ſentiments became different from the tenets which he ſubſcribed. Becauſe, if they had meant this, I ſay it would, in the directeſt manner, have been taking this clauſe in the firſt ſenſe, which we have ſhewn, and they themſelves acknowledge, to be abſurd. Nay, in this particular caſe it would have been infinitely more abſurd than in any other. The binding down every clergyman to leave the ſociety as ſoon as his opinions ceaſed to be the ſame with thoſe which

he believed at his admiſſion, would, in effect, have been exacting a promiſe, not from a ſingle man, and he on the ſpot, but it would have been exacting a promiſe from the whole church of Scotland, through endleſs and unborn generations downwards, to believe theſe articles. Than this, nothing can be more inexpreſſibly abſurd and incredible. I ſpeak not of the *right* which they had to impoſe a ſubſcription. But I ſay, that in getting this ſubſcription eſtabliſhed into a perpetual law, the * impoſers of it themſelves, could never, in fact, underſtand it in this abſurd ſenſe; becauſe ſuch a ſenſe of it muſt have been eſtabliſhed upon this ſuppoſition, that the whole

* I muſt here, however, obſerve that it is not material to the argument what ideas the impoſers of our Formula might, in fact, have upon this point. It is ſufficient that this ſenſe of the clauſe is abſurd in itſelf, and the ſame, when brought to the teſt of reaſon, as the other. I am inclined to think, indeed, that they had no ideas upon it at all; but tranſmitted it to poſterity ſimply as they received it, undefined and unexamined. My reaſon for being of this opinion will appear by and by.

church

church of Scotland, in all ages to come, *could* and *would* diveſt themſelves of their own unalienable right of private judgment, in favour of *their* eſtabliſhment. The getting ſubſcription eſtabliſhed into a law in this ſenſe would really, and in effect, have been exacting a promiſe from the whole church to continue to believe the ſame tenets for ever, and making one generation ſucceſſively ſponſors for another. It is evident that theſe two ſenſes of the clauſe are, at bottom, the ſame. The laſt, conſidered with reſpect to the whole church, is the ſame as the firſt, conſidered with reſpect to individuals. They lead, therefore, to the very ſame inconſiſtencies, and are loaded with the ſame abſurdities.

Laſtly, For it is not neceſſary to puſh this argument farther.—If the compoſers of our Formula, by requiring our promiſe that we would adhere to the opinions we ſubſcribed, meant to take our promiſe that we would leave the church as ſoon as we ceaſed to believe any of theſe opinions, why did they not expreſly ſay ſo?

The

The one propoſition was as eaſy to be expreſſed as the other. In a caſe of ſuch importance, why leave the ſmalleſt room for argument or ambiguity?—Let us conſider farther. The very intention of Formulas is preciſion. They are intended to ſpecify, and determine expreſly the nature of our ſubſcription. The Formula of 1711 in particular was, according to the orthodox themſelves, deſigned as an improvement, in this very reſpect, upon the old one. We may be aſſured, from this circumſtance alone, that the compoſers of it ſtudied the utmoſt preciſion in their definitions; and, if this had been their ſenſe of the clauſe, they would undoubtedly have told us ſo.

What, then, is the meaning of this promiſe of adherence? We have ſhewn that it can never be underſtood as a promiſe that the ſubſcriber will continue to believe the ſame opinions. We have alſo ſhewn that it can ſtill leſs be explained into a promiſe that he will leave the church as ſoon as any of his opinions come to be different from the opinions

which he ſubſcribes. Is it, then, that he will continue to adhere to them, that is, to teach them, and make people think he believes them, even after he does not believe them? Such a promiſe would be unworthy of clergymen to require, unworthy of a chriſtian to give. Or, laſtly, which is nearly the ſame; does he promiſe to abide by them as articles of *peace?* The orthodox will not aſſert this. What, then, is the meaning of this promiſe? The original deviſers of it muſt undoubtedly have had an idea of ſome kind in their minds when they impoſed it.—I ſhall give my opinion of it in a few words. It appears to me to be no more than an engagement to adhere to theſe articles, that is, to teach them, while the ſubſcriber believes them—without any farther obligation. You will ſay this is no engagement at all. But it is, and the moſt important of all engagements. It is an engagement to act the part of an honeſt man. It is an engagement never to make any innovations upon thoſe doctrines of Chriſtianity which he has now ſubſcribed, and

which

which his heart approves, from motives of ambition, from intereſt, or from popular applauſe. But it is no engagement to abide by them, though he ſhould diſcover them to be falſe. The engagement ſuppoſes that he acknowledges them in his heart to be true. As little is it an engagement to leave the church in the event of ſuch a diſcovery. The propoſition itſelf is as abſolute as it can be made by words.

In confirmation of this ſenſe of the clauſe, I ſhall here add the following particulars.

1*ſt*, It is the only rational, at leaſt it is the only Chriſtian ſenſe which it admits. All the other ſenſes are either evidently abſurd, or ſuch as no honeſt man will adopt. They are either inconſiſtent with the firſt principles of common ſenſe, or with the direct terms of the Formula, or with Chriſtian ſincerity.

2*dly*, So far as the ſtability of our ſentiments is concerned, this is all which, in fact, we can promiſe about the matter. To promiſe an abſolute adherence even to

our

our own opinions is not in our power. No ſociety, no man would be abſurd enough to require it. But every man is bound, by the laws of every ſociety, for his own moral conduct; and a promiſe of adherence to the rules of rectitude, upon his admiſſion into any ſociety, can never be deemed an unreaſonable, in the preſent ſtate of human nature it can never be accounted a ſuperfluous requiſition.

3*dly*, The abſolute terms in which the clauſe itſelf is expreſſed are a proof that it muſt be underſtood in this ſenſe. We promiſe to adhere to theſe opinions, we promiſe to maintain and defend them, we promiſe never to endeavour the prejudice or ſubverſion of them. But will we adhere to them, if we * diſcover them to

* We certainly bind ourſelves to do nothing ſuch. At the ſame time it would have been ſuperfluous in the deviſers of this clauſe, even ſuppoſing them to have had it in their minds, to have expreſly obſerved this. Such a diſcovery, ſuppoſing it to be made, can never ſurely be conſtructed into a breach of a clergyman's engagements. Indeed, if the article of leaving the church in ſuch an event were tacked to it, there would be ſuch a breach. But there is no ſuch article.

be abſurd? Will we maintain and defend them, if we diſcover them to be pernicious? Will we never endeavour to ſubvert them, if we ſhould think it our duty to do it? It is evident that every part of this engagement proceeds upon the ſuppoſition of belief, and is not otherwiſe intelligible. It is impoſſible to conceive this clauſe, in the abſolute manner in which it is laid, without taking in this idea.

4*thly*, But what if I ſhould afterwards actually diſcover theſe opinions to be abſurd? What if I ſhould diſcover them to be pernicious? You muſt leave the church. But read the Formula, and tell me if you think that this caſe is once mentioned in it.

5*thly*, Let us compare theſe two ſenſes of the clauſe a little more cloſely. The clauſe itſelf is expreſſed in the moſt abſolute terms which can be deviſed. It is a poſitive promiſe, firmly and conſtantly to adhere to certain opinions; to aſſert, maintain, and defend them to the utmoſt of our power; and never endeavour, directly

rectly or indirectly, their prejudice or ſubverſion. Two things are evident here. 1*ſt*, It is evident that the firſt ſenſe of the clauſe, viz. that it is a promiſe to continue to believe the ſame opinions, is abſurd, and it is accounted ſo by both parties. 2*dly*, It is evident that the ſtrict letter of the clauſe itſelf is deſerted by both. Neither party has any thing to upbraid the other with in this reſpect. It is acknowledged on all hands that it requires explanation. The only queſtion, then, which remains is, which of the two explanations is the more natural, and moſt agreeable to proteſtant principles?—The orthodox explain it by ſaying that it means an engagement to leave the church as ſoon as we find our opinions different from her ſtandards.—We inſiſt that it means no more than what is exacted every day at a man's admiſſion into any public office, a promiſe of honeſty, a promiſe that we will faithfully follow the light of our own minds, and act conformably to our ſentiments. At firſt view there lies this prejudice againſt the orthodox ſenſe.

So far from appearing to be a promiſe of *adherence*, it ſeems, on the contrary, to convert the clauſe into a promiſe of *deſertion*. This looks ill. Upon inſpecting it more nearly, it appears, ſo far as language may be depended on, to be at leaſt a different propoſition. It is ſo different, that if the compoſers of our Formula had once had it in their thoughts, we cannot allow ourſelves to think that men whoſe very intention in compoſing that Formula was, accuracy, would not have ſpoken plainly upon the occaſion, and named an article of ſuch conſequence in expreſs terms. Upon inſpecting it more nearly ſtill, we find that the abſurdity of the firſt ſenſe is not removed by it; becauſe both ſenſes proceed, at bottom, upon the ſame principles. The ſenſe which the orthodox would put upon it, when traced to its ſource, and conſidered as it affects the whole church, is the very ſame with the other. It finally reſolves itſelf into the ſame abſurd promiſe to continue to believe the ſame opinions. The giving it this turn, there-

fore, does not at all mend the matter. But the ſenſe of it now given is liable to none of theſe difficulties. Let us ſtate the clauſe with the additions made to it by both parties. Say the orthodox,—"I promiſe to adhere to theſe opinions, I promiſe to maintain and defend them, I promiſe never to endeavour the prejudice or ſubverſion of them—while I continue in the church."—Say the other party,—"I promiſe to adhere to theſe opinions, I promiſe to maintain and defend them, I promiſe never to endeavour the prejudice or ſubverſion of them—"while I believe in them." Here it is evident that the orthodox addition is ſo very material, that, if it was at all meant to be included in the clauſe, it is aſtoniſhing to the laſt degree that ſuch exact men as the compoſers of our Formula were, did not expreſly inſert it. On the other hand, it is equally evident that the addition here contended for is ſo immaterial, in other words it is ſo ſelf-obvious, that the expreſs inſertion of it would have been perfectly ſuperfluous. You cannot conceive

the clauſe itſelf without having it in your mind. It is neceſſary to make it ſenſe.—The very terms too in which the clauſe is expreſſed confirm this meaning. We promiſe to adhere *firmly* and *conſtantly*. But firmly and conſtantly to what? Certainly to our own ſentiments. It is evidently a moral virtue which is here recommended. Firmneſs and conſtancy, in the very idea of them, ſuppoſe a man's own mind to be the ſtandard. A firm man is a man who acts invariably in conſequence of his own opinion, and can, by no means, be moved to depart from this path while he is convinced it is the right one. Now ſuch is this promiſe in the preſent caſe. The church requires you to declare whether certain opinions be agreeable to your ſentiments? Upon your anſwering in the affirmative, they then require that you will be firm and conſtant to theſe your ſentiments, and never act in oppoſition to them. This is the plain account of the whole tranſaction. That they continue to be your ſentiments, is the very ſuppoſi-

tion

tion upon which you are required to adhere to them.

6thly, This ſenſe is ſtill farther confirmed by another article of this clauſe. We promiſe that, "through the grace of God," we will firmly and conſtantly adhere to our opinions.—Here again the engagement proceeds upon the ſuppoſition that theſe opinions to which we promiſe this conſtant adherence continue to be our ſentiments. It is evident that the words can admit no other ſenſe without being much wreſted. This is their natural and eaſy meaning. Our promiſing, through the grace of God, conſtantly to adhere to certain opinions, and, by ſo doing, to act the part of honeſt men, manifeſtly ſuppoſes that theſe opinions continue to be our ſentiments. Upon any other ſuppoſition, this article is inſerted here with the utmoſt impropriety. The grace of God always refers to our integrity. It is for this, therefore, that we here engage, and for nothing elſe. It is impoſſible to introduce the grace of God into an engagement of any other nature. Now we pro-

miſe to adhere *conſtantly* to certain opinions, and *never* to endeavour their ſubverſion. In requiring this promiſe, the church thinks ſhe ſecures our future honeſty; and, in reliance upon the aſſiſtance of divine grace, we give this promiſe, and reſolve to be honeſt. But I aſk how we can be honeſt by conſtantly adhering to opinions, and never endeavouring their ſubverſion, if we do not continue to believe them? Upon any other ſuppoſition, this engagement contradicts itſelf, and would fruſtrate its own intention.

Let us conſider it upon the orthodox hypotheſis. According to that account, the moment we change our ſentiments in any point we engage to leave the church. Of what uſe, then, is the grace of God in ſuch an engagement? Or with what propriety is it inſerted? It muſt refer to one of two things. It muſt either refer to our ſentiments while we continue in the church, or it muſt refer to the fulfilling our engagement when we change theſe ſentiments. In the firſt caſe it is ſuperflu-

ous.

ous. If we are bound to leave the church as ſoon as we alter our opinions, it would be ſuperfluous to engage, through the grace of God, to adhere to them while we continue in the church. It would, in other words, be engaging, through the grace of God, to believe theſe opinions while we do believe them, or to adhere to them (in what ſenſe you will) while we adhere to them. It would, indeed, upon this hypotheſis, be ſuperfluous to engage to adhere to them at all; becauſe the moment we ceaſe to believe them, we are bound to leave the church, and then our engagement is at an end. If they be agreeable to our ſentiments, we will believe them; if not, the orthodox cannot certainly mean to pray that God would aſſiſt us to believe them notwithſtanding. On the other hand, if it be ſaid that this article refers to the fulfilling our engagement when we change theſe ſentiments, and that the clauſe is equivalent to the engaging, through the grace of God, to leave the church in this event; —I inſiſt upon it that this explanation is forced, and cannot be ſupported by any

rules of language. We promiſe that, through the grace of God, we ſhall firmly and conſtantly adhere to the doctrine, worſhip, and government of this church. Theſe are the expreſs words of the Formula, and they muſt not be wreſted.

7thly, That this is the real account of this matter, is alſo evident from the origin and hiſtory of this clauſe, in the religious engagements of this church. The original of it appears to me to have been this.—When the nation firſt threw off the yoke of popery, the court was wholly in the Popiſh intereſt, and did their utmoſt to ſupport it. For this purpoſe they had recourſe to arms and artifice, and employed every mean which violence or policy ſuggeſted to cruſh the reformers, or detach them from their party. The reformers again, on the other hand, in order to encounter this oppoſition, and to preſerve themſelves from ruin, were obliged, in their turn, to unite themſelves together, and to invent every poſſible bond which could cement their union, and render it laſting. The ſtep, therefore, which they took, and it was cer-

certainly as neceſſary in their ſituation as it was political, was firſt to ſtate the principles for which they contended, and then to take a ſolemn oath, and enter into the moſt ſacred engagements, that, in ſpite of every oppoſition or temptation which might be employed to terrify or ſeduce them from their duty, they would firmly and invariably adhere to theſe principles; they would aſſert, maintain, and defend them, with their utmoſt power, and at the peril of their lives and fortunes; and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, their prejudice or ſubverſion. This tranſaction and the ſincerity of their hearts, they called the Lord God of heaven and earth to witneſs; and accompanied the engagement with every circumſtance which could render it ſolemn and ſtriking. After the danger of popery was removed, and the court had changed the object of oppoſition; the nation was obliged to renew the ſame engagements, with the ſame forms, and from the ſame motives, againſt prelacy. This new enemy, as formidable to our fathers as the former, they were obliged to encounter

with the ſame weapons. The race of Stuarts, with a perſeverance, which in this age would be accounted infatuation, made endleſs attempts to eſtabliſh this hated mode of worſhip in Scotland; and conducted theſe attempts with ſuch venal policy, and ſuch oppreſſive exertions of arbitrary authority, as ſtill excite deteſtation. The Preſbyterians, therefore, in order to revive the ſpirit of the nation, and to preſerve that mode of worſhip which alone was conſiſtent with their conſcience, were obliged, at different periods, to enter into repeated engagements of defence and union. In all theſe engagements, while ſo many were in danger of being ſeduced or terrified from the dictates of their duty, *firmneſs*, *conſtancy*, *adherence* to their principles was always, as may eaſily be judged, a capital article. This clauſe made an eſſential part in ſuch engagements. In every new bond of aſſociation which was formed, it was ſure of being principally attended to; till at length it became an eſtabliſhed *form* in every deed of that nature, and continued

to

to be inſerted in our religious ſubſcriptions even after the reaſon on which it was founded ceaſed, and the very meaning of it was forgotten.

8*thly*, That it was merely a promiſe of honeſty, that it proceeded upon the foundation of belief, and terminated not in leaving the church, nor had any relation to ſuch an event, is evident from another circumſtance. Thoſe who did leave the church at that time did not eſcape the odium of having broken their engagements. They were univerſally branded with apoſtacy. They were accounted perjured, and their names and memories execrated as the deſerters of a public cauſe, and the betrayers of God and their Saviour. But had their engagements terminated in leaving the church, or been at all underſtood in this ſenſe, it is impoſſible they could have been regarded in this light. On the other hand, our fathers could not certainly think that they were bound down, under the pain of perjury, to the ſame ſyſtem of belief. The truth is, they thought, and often juſtly, that

that their departure from the church was not owing to conſcience. Our fathers, good men! were ſo firmly perſuaded of the truth of their own opinions, they thought them ſo ſelf-evident, that it was impoſſible, as they imagined, for any man who was acquainted with them not to believe them. But that a man who once believed them, and ſolemnly profeſſed this belief, could afterwards come to think them falſe—of this they had no conception. Hence, amidſt the ſincereſt love of truth, the moſt fervent piety, and an unextinguiſhable zeal for the cauſe of God and goodneſs, we may account for their total want of charity towards thoſe of a different perſuaſion. No man, who was not regarded as utterly ignorant of religion, which few at that time were, could differ from them without being accounted criminal, and devoid of principle. This was, generally ſpeaking, the caſe of all the religious ſects in thoſe days. If a man once believed their opinions, all which they thought was neceſſary to ſecure him to their communion for ever, was—

honeſty. To confirm this, and with this view only, they exacted a ſolemn promiſe and oath that he would *adhere* to his ſentiments; and, if he afterwards departed from thoſe opinions which he had ſaid, or they had reaſon to believe, once were his ſentiments, let him leave the church, let him do every thing which the orthodox party at preſent would require him in ſuch a caſe to do, yet they branded him with perjury, and accounted him a villain. They could not conceive that it was poſſible he could change his ſentiments. They inſiſted upon it, and often, indeed, with juſtice, as has been already obſerved, that he had ſold his conſcience, and that he ſtill at bottom believed the opinions which he abjured. An attention to this circumſtance, ſo natural in that age, will account for that unlimited and unconditional promiſe of adherence to ſpeculative opinions which they exacted in their religious engagements, and which, upon any other hypotheſis, appears to me inexplicable. We are under no neceſſity of aſcribing to the original framers of this

clauſe

clauſe any merit in this affair. If they made no proviſion againſt a future change of ſentiment in ſubſcribers, it will ſufficiently account for it to ſuppoſe that ſuch an event did not occur to them. Had it occurred to them, or appeared of any conſequence, we may grant, without danger to the argument, that perhaps they were zealous enough to have attended to it. In that caſe, it is poſſible they might have been explicit. But we have nothing to do here with poſſibilities. The fact is, they have made no proviſion for this event. The clauſe is abſolute. This, by itſelf, is a proof of what is now aſſerted. It is a proof that the clauſe was originally made with views quite different from thoſe for which the orthodox now contend. At the ſame time I muſt obſerve, that could it even be ſhewn that our reformers, or the compoſers of our Formula, or the whole church, had from the beginning underſtood the clauſe in this ſenſe, and that the abſurdity implied in it had eſcaped them; it would be incumbent on us, who ſee that abſurdity, to pay no regard

gard to their ſentiments, and to reject it. But we are under no neceſſity of taking up the argument in this light. The ſhort hiſtory of the clauſe is this. The firſt deviſers of it did not, in fact, make that proviſion againſt a change of ſentiment which the orthodox now inſiſt upon, becauſe it was not deviſed with a view to that event; and the authors of our Formula took the clauſe upon *their* credit, and tranſmitted it to *us* as it came to *themſelves*, without examination, and without amendment.

9*thly*, Another proof that the original meaning of this clauſe muſt be what we have here repreſented, is the declaration of the church herſelf. We have already obſerved that, at the time the firſt Confeſſion of the Scots reformed church came abroad, objections againſt the opinions contained in it were actually invited. If, in conſequence of this invitation, objections had been advanced, the compoſers of that Confeſſion engaged either to ſatisfy the objector that his objections were ill founded, or if they ſhould be found

juſt,

juſt, they promiſed expreſly that the opinions againſt which they were laid ſhould be altered. This is to be regarded as the deed of the church herſelf, and it is deciſive. Nor is this declaration to be conſidered as limited to a particular period, within which if no objections were advanced the confeſſion was then to be fixed, and remain for ever after unaltered. It was printed with the Confeſſion itſelf; and, conſequently, muſt be underſtood to accompany it to poſterity. There is an expreſs promiſe made that, if the opinions of the church ſhould be found wrong, they ſhall be amended; but there is not the moſt diſtant implication that the objector, if his objections ſhould be found null, and himſelf remain unconvinced, ſhall be expelled from the church. The church, on the contrary, promiſes to ſatisfy him with regard to his ſcruples. I dare to ſay, however, he would not readily be brought to think this promiſe fulfilled by expelling him. The fact is, this declaration runs in the ſame channel with the religious engagements, and general train

of

of men's thoughts at that time. The church of Scotland had juſt rejected the doctrine of infallibility. In conſequence of this, ſhe required only *general* approbation to her doctrines. The declaration we are now conſidering was another conſequence from the ſame principle. While this principle continued freſh in the memories of men, and was even the ſubject of daily declamation, it would have been abſurd to have talked in any other ſtile.

Some may think this declaration inconſiſtent with that abſolute perſuaſion of the truth of their own opinions which I have aſcribed to our fathers in the laſt article. The inconſiſtency, however, is only in appearance. They might be convinced of the abſurdity of the popiſh doctrine of infallibility, and lay down general rules in conſequence of this conviction; and yet be extremely poſitive that they were in the right themſelves. This is not at all improbable. The hiſtory of religion abounds with ſuch contradictions; and, though the nearer it is to its origin it is more ſimple, yet it cannot

even

even then be expected to be altogether free of them. For my part, I believe that both theſe cauſes operated on this occaſion to produce the ſame effect. The firſt was ſtronger at the beginning; the laſt gained the aſcendant gradually. Our reformers themſelves would naturally be leſs poſitive, and from modeſty as well as principle would be diſpoſed to regard their own work as imperfect. In this ſituation of things, ſuch a declaration as we have mentioned would be extremely natural, and any bonds of adherence which they might form would be rather of a civil than a religious nature. This would not be the caſe of their ſucceſſors. The farther they removed from the times of popery, and the weaker the impreſſion of her tyranny became in their minds, they would more and more loſe ſight of their own principles, and become the more dogmatical. At the ſame time, their confidence in their own opinions, combined with their high reverence for the reformers, would lead them to conclude that their own ſentiments and views were,

in every point, the ſame with *theirs.* In conſequence of this, they would religiouſly preſerve the primitive forms; they would renew them in what they accounted ſimilar emergencies; they would make additions. In this form, the whole code would paſs to poſterity, and afford ample room for criticiſm and altercation.

10*thly*, The laſt particular I ſhall adduce to ſhew that this is the true ſenſe of the clauſe is this. Though the clergy and bulk of the nation were at that time ſo bigotted to their own opinions as not to think an actual alteration poſſible, and, conſequently, made no proviſion for this event in their religious engagements; yet it appears that ſome of the lay ſubſcribers, whoſe ſtations were higher in life, and whoſe ſentiments were more enlarged, foreſaw the poſſibility of this event; and, to prevent every ſhadow of reproach in that zealous age, and that the moſt unenlightened might not miſtake the nature of the obligation, actually inſerted in their ſubſcription, though in other words, the addition which we have ſaid is na-

tively implied in it, and for which we have been contending. In the Confeſſion ſubſcribed at Holyrood-houſe, the 25th of February 1587-8, by the King, Lennox, Huntly, the Chancellor, and above ninety other perſons, after theſe words, "promiſing and ſwearing, by the great name of the Lord our God, that we ſhall *continue* in the obedience of the doctrine and diſcipline of this kirk,"—is added this material clauſe—"*agreeing to the word:*" that is, by all rules of language, they promiſed to continue in the obedience of this doctrine and diſcipline ſo long as they ſhould appear to them to agree to the word *; in other words, ſo long as they ſhould believe them. This is a fact in point. The intention of inſerting theſe words, on this occaſion, was evidently to define the clauſe, and ſtate

* People who have not an opportunity of ſatisfying themſelves in any other way, may conſult the note at the bottom of page 440 of our Confeſſion, publiſhed at Glaſgow, in the year MDCC.LIII. which is that edition of it, I ſuppoſe, which Mr. Ferguſſon alludes to in his appendix.

the nature of their engagement to the nation. In this definition, the article of leaving the church is not mentioned. At the ſame time, an unlimited adherence is excluded. What need is there to puſh the argument any farther? The fact is direct, and it is unneceſſary to repeat the inference.

I ſhall conclude this part by making ſome obſervations upon a letter which appeared in the Scots Magazine for January 1768, and was ſubſcribed Philalethes. I have ſelected this from the other pieces which were written on the ſame ſide upon this occaſion, not only as it contains the moſt argument, and is the moſt moderate; but alſo, becauſe it is a profeſſed vindication of the Synod which authoriſed this proſecution. In making theſe obſervations, I ſhall enlarge the debate, and bring it back to its firſt ground. We have, for ſome time, confined ourſelves to the point of ſubſcription. This, however, is but an inferior ſubject.—I would intreat the author of that letter to attend to the following remarks on his performance.

He ſubſcribes himſelf a lover of truth. From this circumſtance it might have been expected that, in treating thoſe capital doctrines which he ſays Mr. A. B. has attacked, he would have made *truth*, and *truth* only, his ſtandard, without regard to any human ſyſtem, however eſtabliſhed. Certainly, thought I, this gentleman will regard Mr. A. B.'s letter in its proper light; as an attempt to diſunite *truth* and *authority*. He will conſider how far Mr. A. B.'s aſſertion, that they are at preſent actually diſunited, is well founded. Even granting that his ſentiments are oppoſite to thoſe of Mr. A. B. yet what that gentleman has advanced may, perhaps, induce him to *review* the ſubject. Philalethes will undoubtedly confine himſelf to *this* point, and to this only.

But I was diſappointed. Philalethes, in this particular, has proceeded on the ſame plan with the reſt. He has laid down the Confeſſion as a ſtandard; he has confined himſelf to the examination how far Mr. A. B.'s opinions agree with this

this ſtandard; he has waved the proper point of enquiry; and, what makes it the more culpable in *him*, he appears to have ſeen it. Theſe aſſertions muſt be proved from his letter.

He ſets out with conſidering what Mr. A. B. has advanced as an *affront* offered to the doctrine and diſcipline of the church of Scotland. His words are—"But ſurely the orthodox intereſt muſt be ſuppoſed very low indeed, if the doctrine and diſcipline too of the church of Scotland muſt put up with ſuch a flagrant *affront* from one of its own miniſters without the leaſt motion in its favour."—And certainly he was in the right in one ſenſe, if that was his meaning; for daily experience teacheth us that it is always regarded by certain people as an *affront* to be found in the wrong.

The remainder of what he ſays on this part of the ſubject he employs in ſhewing that the Socinian and orthodox ſyſtems are quite different religions; and, upon this principle, he proceeds to juſtify the conduct of the Synod with regard to

Mr. A. B. He never once pretends to diſcuſs the queſtion, which of theſe two ſyſtems is the *right?* To make the matter the plainer, he expreſly clears himſelf from having any ſuch intention; and yet he condemns Mr. A. B. as they have all done, with as much aſſurance as if this queſtion had been previouſly diſcuſſed, and determined in their own favour.

What I admired moſt was the following ſentence:—"Whether the Socinian ſyſtem of doctrine or that commonly called the orthodox be moſt agreeable to the word of God, and moſt conſonant to right reaſon, is a queſtion for a full diſcuſſion of which there ſeems to be a preſent call in providence." Here he acknowledges in expreſs words, if I underſtand him right, the propriety of this diſcuſſion in the preſent caſe. And yet he makes no other excuſe for omitting an enquiry, which ought, by all the rules of candour, to have preceded every thing he has ſaid, than that it would exceed the bounds of the Scots Magazine. If this be the fact, the only concluſion which Philalethes could,

in

in any conſiſtency with his appellation, have drawn from it was,—that, therefore, until this point was previouſly determined, he ought to have held his peace, and ſaid nothing on the ſubject.

In juſtifying the proceedings of the Synod, he draws together every circumſtance which he thinks of weight to aggravate the ſuppoſed offence. He takes notice, with this view, that the attack upon the orthodox ſyſtem was made on this occaſion in the moſt open, and, as he terms it, in the moſt immodeſt manner: that there was not the ſmalleſt attempt made to elude the laws of the church, as had formerly been the practice in ſuch caſes, either by the means of equivocal expreſſion, or indeed by ſo much as pretending the conſiſtency of his tenets with the eſtabliſhed doctrine. To load this catalogue more, he mentions the infinite importance of the doctrines which Mr. A. B. has attacked: he inſiſts again and again upon the direct inconſiſtency of his opinions with that ſyſtem which was eſtabliſhed among us ſome

hundreds of years ago: and charges him with having afforded his ſuperiors no pretence for lenity, no plauſible circumſtance to ſave their bluſhes, had they ſuffered ſuch a letter to paſs unnoticed.

Now, to an unprejudiced ſpectator of this debate, there is not one of theſe circumſtances which does not plead ſtrongly either in favour of Mr. A. B. or of the cauſe which he eſpouſes. Was the attack *open?* This argues the ſincerity, the intrepidity of a man who defends the cauſe of truth, and is fearleſs to expoſe it. Has he laid his ſentiments before the *public* without *diſguiſe?* This demonſtrates him to be above thoſe little arts of management which you mention. It demonſtrates alſo his thorough conviction of the opinions he avows, ſince he has hazarded his intereſt in ſupport of them. Are his opinions ſo totally inconſiſtent with the eſtabliſhed doctrines; and are theſe doctrines of ſuch infinite importance? What concluſion can a lover of truth draw from this, but that there is the more need to examine them? A man ſtands forth in a

public cauſe, contrary to his own intereſt; he expoſes himſelf to the moſt imminent hazard in defence of ſentiments in which he has no peculiar concern. Whether do theſe circumſtances make for him, or againſt him? Mr. A. B. has ſpoken plainly.—We grant it. He has attacked eſtabliſhed doctrines.—We grant this too. Theſe doctrines are of the laſt conſequence. —Be it ſo. In the warmth of his zeal he has *neglected*—what if we ſhould uſe the term *deſpiſed*—that little prudence which, in this little world, is often neceſſary to ſecure a man's own intereſt, even while he is labouring for the benefit of others. We grant all this, and more. Is it, then, a vice in this degenerate age to be too ſincere, too adventurous in the cauſe of truth, and too diſintereſted? No, Philalethes! it is not for paſſing over ſuch a conduct unnoticed merely that the Synod of Glaſgow and Ayr ſhould have bluſhed. Every Synod in Scotland, Sir! ought to redden this moment that they have not yet *dared* to give it their *fulleſt* and *moſt public approbation*.

Additional

Additional to all theſe topics, and that he may make the juſtification of the Synod compleat, he names ſix pernicious conſequences which would have followed had the Synod ſuffered this letter to paſs unnoticed. Upon theſe I would obſerve,

1ſt, The firſt four of theſe conſequences are merely of a political nature; that is to ſay, they would follow upon whatever ſide the *truth* is ſuppoſed to lie; even though Mr. A. B.'s tenets ſhould come out to be juſt, and the orthodox ſyſtem erroneous. What a ſhame is it for chriſtians, for proteſtants to reaſon upon ſuch principles? Are theſe the men who are inceſſantly putting the queſtion, "Is *truth* to be ſacrificed to *peace*?" Is it you whom we hear eternally extolling the glorious days of martyrdom, and inſinuating that you, and you only, ſtill hold uncorrupted thoſe perſecuted opinions which triumphed over all the powers of eſtabliſhment? Go, ye narrow mortals! for ye are not, ye cannot be the ſucceſſors of theſe champions for *truth* and *liberty*. *They* dared to look into eſtabliſhed opinions, to contradict

tradict them, and to ſuffer for them too—as Mr. A. B. has done.—*You* compare yourſelves to Donald Cargill! Not at all. Donald poſitively denied that *Authority*, no not the king's, was of any conſequence in matters of religion. He aſſerted, in the open air, in the preſence of heaven and earth, and before Synods and Preſbyteries—when it was convenient for him to go to them—that political conſiderations reſpecting ſocieties, or even drawn from his own private intereſt, were of no weight when laid in the balance againſt the cauſe of truth, and the intereſts of his dear maſter, and ought not to be regarded. Mr. A. B. ſays the ſame thing. You inſiſt that A. B. ought to be perſecuted with eccleſiaſtical vengeance, becauſe his tenets are oppoſite to the tenets of a certain religious ſociety. But are they oppoſite to *truth*? How came you not to take up the queſtion in *this* view? I profeſs, in the ſincerity of my heart, I regard you as one of the moſt charitable of your party; but, indeed, Philalethes! with all my partiality for you, I cannot help

help thinking that you ought, on this occaſion, in conſiſtency—I ſay not with your *intentions*—but with the *manner* in which you have managed your argument, to have ſubſcribed yourſelf, not a Lover of *Truth*, but a Lover of *Orthodoxy*.

2dly, For, Sir! reflect on the firſt evil conſequence of the Synod's ſilence which you inſiſt upon. Your words are,—"The firſt pernicious conſequence is an entire ſurrender of all the advantages which the orthodox religion has hitherto been thought to poſſeſs by our preſent eſtabliſhment." To place this in its proper light, allow me to aſk you one queſtion. If what you call the orthodox religion ſhould, upon examination, appear even to *you* to be a falſe one, would you not be willing to give it up, and, conſequently, to make an entire ſurrender of all the advantages with which it is attended? What good purpoſe, then, doth it anſwer to reaſon upon political principles where *truth* is the queſtion? Or to aſk us what anſwer we could make to the *Seceders* in caſe of ſuch a revolution? Or

to

to refer us to the form of proceſs, chap. 6. § 1. the Confeſſion of Faith, chap. 20. § 4. and chap. 30. § 3. and the Act 21 of the General Aſſembly 1696?

3dly, The 5th pernicious conſequence which Philalethes inſiſts upon is, that "if the Synod had paſſed this letter of Mr. A. B. over in ſilence, they would have diſregarded the expreſs command of God himſelf." This is availing themſelves of the conſtitution with a witneſs. It is taking every ſingle article for granted which ought to be proved. Let me inculcate this point once more, for I am weary with repeating it. Would it not be proper, before you puniſh, to enquire into the juſtice of the puniſhment? I aſk this queſtion for the ſake of your own humanity. Would it not be alſo proper, before you condemn a man for holding certain doctrines, to examine whether theſe doctrines are wrong? I put this queſtion for the ſake of truth. Would it not be proper, finally, before you condemn a ſociety for diſobedience to the commands of God, to examine what it is

is which God hath commanded? Do you ſeriouſly imagine that God will puniſh any man for breaking your acts of aſſembly? For the love of God, my brethren! if we muſt obteſt you in the name of truth, of humanity, and of common ſenſe in vain; ſuffer yourſelves to be perſuaded to alter your preſent plan of conduct, and expoſe not religion any longer to the inſults of the infidel by the dictatorial, and violent ſpirit of you its profeſſors.

4thly, He juſtifies the Synod by aſſerting that the crime before them was diſſimulation; a crime pernicious to ſociety in the higheſt degree, and which no judicature could poſſibly paſs over without the ſevereſt animadverſion.

Here, again, it is obvious to obſerve that the point is taken for granted which ought to have been proved. Mr. A. B. nor none of thoſe who have written on the ſame ſide juſtify any ſuch practice. On the contrary, they expreſly refuſe it. Their adverſaries, indeed, aſſert it. It would not be to their purpoſe to remember

ber that they have been again and again contradicted.

It is remarkable that, from the very beginning of this diſpute, the oppoſite party have endeavoured to turn the whole force of the debate upon this point. This point, however, is only a ſubordinate one. According to their own aſſertions, Mr. A. B has attacked their moſt important doctrines in the moſt unreſerved manner. One would, therefore, be naturally led to think that the main action would lie *here*. What is it to this point whether Mr. A. B. has been guilty of diſſimulation or not, or in what ſenſe ſubſcription is taken? He ſtands not ſingle in his opinions. The orthodox party acknowledge and lament that he is engaged in a joint cauſe with a very great diviſion of chriſtians in this kingdom. They even acknowledge that there ſeems to be a preſent call in providence for a diſcuſſion which of the two parties is in the right. Take the whole in this light, and we have as capital a tranſaction before us as ever paſſed upon the religious theatre of Scotland.

For

For theſe reaſons I conſider the diſpute relating to ſubſcription from the beginning as an attempt made by the orthodox party to wave the principal ſubject. On that account I was inclined to neglect it altogether. But being afraid leſt, while our main attention was fixed on the capital object, ſome leſſer point might be thought by our adverſaries to be given up becauſe no anſwer was returned, I have, with this view, ventured to give my thoughts alſo upon this particular. I have endeavoured to ſtate ſubſcription upon its proper principles, and to reconcile it with fact and reaſon. What I have ſuggeſted on this head will advance the argument ſtill a ſtep farther. If my view of this affair be juſt, it will not be ſo clear a matter that the orthodox are ſupported even by the conſtitution as they imagine. It will appear that the church herſelf regards not her doctrines in that ſacred light which is pretended, nor deems an attack upon them to be a matter of ſuch preſumption. The obſervations of Philalethes on this

this point are as inconclusive as the former.

Philalethes says that the practice vindicated by Mr. A. B. is, "a solemn profession and declaration made before God, in a meeting for public worship, by a minister at his ordination, and signed with his hand, that he believes all the doctrines contained in the Confession of Faith to be founded on and agreeable to the Scriptures, or, the truths of God; while it is owned that he believes no such thing." Mr. A. B.'s own words are,—in one place, "I have been also told, you said you would pronounce them villains who had signed the Confession of Faith, and did not *believe* every proposition in it to be truth, and *adhere* to it as such." In another place, "some of my brethren who got copies of this letter, wished I had removed the objection of dishonesty in subscribing the Confession of Faith, and not *believing* and *adhering* to every proposition in it as truth."—There is here a manifest omission, for I will call it by no harder name, in Philalethes's representation of Mr.

A. B.'s argument. Mr. A. B. in every paſſage where he mentions ſubſcription, names both *believing* and *adhering*, and diſtinguiſhes them as ſeparate clauſes of the obligation. Philalethes, in the face of his own words, reſtricts him here to the former. We have endeavoured to ſhew that Mr. A. B.'s reaſoning reaches the latter clauſe with full evidence. The promiſing an abſolute adherence to any opinions is inconſiſtent with every principle of our nature as men, and of our profeſſion as proteſtants. As little can it be forced to mean an obligation to leave the church upon a change of ſentiment. There is, therefore, but one ſenſe left, and neceſſity obliges us to adopt it.— Philalethes has taken pains to ſhew that the Formula renders the firſt clauſe abſolute, and that a man cannot honeſtly ſubſcribe the Confeſſion unleſs he believes *every* article which it contains. This ſuppoſes the Formula to be an undiſputed conſtitution of this church, and that Mr. A. B. proceeds upon this ſuppoſition. But what is all he has advanced on this

head

head to the purpoſe, if the Formula be without the queſtion, and if Mr. A. B. be all the while proceeding upon the principle of a general ſubſcription?—Mr. A. B.'s advocates have aſſerted that the orthodox ſenſe of ſubſcription implies a contradiction. The inference from this, according to Philalethes, is, that, therefore, we ought to have nothing to do with it. But the inference which we draw, and it is certainly more honourable for our church, is, that, therefore, this cannot be the ſenſe of it.—Though aware of the diſtinction, Philalethes, in common with the other writers upon this ſubject, has confounded the two parts of ſubſcription together, and extended the concluſion which ariſes from one to both. For example, he talks of people whom no words can bind. Applied to the firſt part of ſubſcription this is argument, but with regard to the laſt it is not. It is abſurd to ſuppoſe that the opinions of mankind can be bound by words. Is there any thing criminal in a man's altering his opinion? I may change my ſentiments on *any* ſub-

ject to-morrow, if I do it from conviction, and who will ſay it is wrong?

When he attempts to conſider the clauſe of adherence by itſelf, his ideas are in manifeſt confuſion. Without defining his meaning, he conſiders it ſimply as a promiſe. He is to ſhew that ſuch a promiſe implies not an inconſiſtency. In doing this, he goes off from the clauſe of adherence. He ſhews that there is no inconſiſtency in the firſt clauſe; and, having ſhewn this, he takes it for granted that he has proved his point.—It will be worth while to try if we can collect from his words what his idea of this promiſe is. "I reſolve, ſays he, (why not promiſe?) to aſſert and maintain (theſe truths) while I live. Why? not becauſe I find them in the Confeſſion of Faith; but for the very reaſon given by the ſubſcribers, becauſe I clearly perceive them to be truths founded on and agreeable to the word of God. It is becauſe I receive them not as the word of men, but as they are in truth the word of God. Wherever I can ſay the one, I ought to ſay the other." Here he gives it

it expreſly as his opinion, that if a man believes the doctrines of our Confeſſion at the time he ſubſcribes them, he *ought*, in conſequence of this belief, to promiſe likewiſe to adhere to them; and he ſuppoſes this to be the reaſon why we ſcruple at the promiſe, becauſe we believe not the doctrines. The whole of this is abſurd. There is no ſort of connection between theſe two clauſes. We may believe the doctrines we ſubſcribe firmly at the time of ſubſcription, and yet not be able to promiſe that we will adhere to this belief. We ſcruple at this promiſe on account of its own abſurdity, and it is this abſurdity which leads us to conclude that no ſuch promiſe is exacted. Hence we inſiſt upon it that we are under no ſuch obligation, and that we may depart from our belief upon conviction. But let him explain himſelf.—"Nay, ſays he, there is nothing more ordinary than to expreſs the one by aſſerting the other." That is, he explains the clauſe of adherence to be nothing more than an expreſſion of preſent belief. It is only, it ſeems, our former

declaration of belief redoubled.—To put it paſt a doubt that this is his ſenſe of it, he makes uſe of *two* inſtances, as illuſtrations, which, upon any other hypotheſis, I cannot help thinking rather unhappy. The one is an expreſſion of Warrenſel. "Docui ſemper, doceo etiamnum, & docebo, per Dei gratiam, dum ſpiritum ducam, ſequentia dogmata inconcuſæ veritatis." The other is part of a ſpeech made in parliament. "My poſition is this:—I repeat it—I will maintain it to my laſt hour." "In ſhort, continues Philalethes, it is what nobody will ſcruple to ſay of any thing which they have a full and undoubted perſuaſion of."—Theſe inſtances put Philalethes's ſenſe of this matter, or ſeem to put it, beyond diſpute. The promiſe of adherence, as well as the declaration of the orator, is nothing more, according to this hypotheſis, than a ſtronger expreſſion of preſent conviction. If this be their meaning, we have no objections to it. We will have as little ſcruple to ſubſcribe the clauſe in this ſenſe as they have. But then,—what becomes

of

of the ſuppoſed obligation to leave the church upon an alteration of ſentiment? Or of the guilt conſequential to this obligation, if we ſhould not leave it? This is manifeſtly excluded. Philalethes may as well contend that the orator he mentions had brought himſelf under an obligation, in ſuch an event, to vacate his ſeat in parliament *.

To

* I own I am a good deal ſurpriſed how Philalethes came to ſtumble upon this unhappy illuſtration. There is certainly ſome difference between the two caſes. The one is a ſolemn promiſe, whatever may be its nature, and the other a flouriſh of rhetoric. I acknowledge this myſelf, though my argument requires it not; but the orthodox ought to contend for it, becauſe their hypotheſis cannot otherwiſe be ſupported. The very ſame orator might, in the very next ſeſſion of Parliament, without incurring the loweſt degree of guilt, far leſs being perjured, have retracted every thing he had then ſaid; and, in defence of what he had done, have urged as vehemently on the other ſide,—"Yes, I was miſtaken, and I glory in acknowledging it. My poſition is this—I repeat it—I will maintain it to my laſt hour. Liberty of ſentiment, a right to change opinion upon the occurrence of different views, is the indefeaſible and unalienable privilege of every human creature." Philalethes

To juſtify a hereſy proceſs in this age requires certainly no common abilities, nor does it aſtoniſh me that Philalethes has failed in ſuch an argument. Upon what principles can he pretend to defend the proſecution againſt Mr. A. B. or to vindicate the Synod which could recommend it? Even if we ſhould grant that it was ſupported by the laws of this church, which, to ſay the leaſt, is problematical; are the miniſters of Chriſt obliged to violate conſcience for the ſake of being conſiſtent, or to proceed, in a caſe of ſuch moment, upon conſtitutions which, it is allowed by their advocates themſelves, require to be examined? To proſecute a man upon ſuch conſtitutions, or to reaſon upon ſuch principles, is unjuſt and indefenſible. Admitting the tenets of our church to have a more plauſible aſpect of truth than we find they have, and admit-

lethes muſt certainly acknowlege a difference here,—unleſs he puts a *promiſe* upon the ſame level with a *figure of ſpeech*. Poſſibly *this* may be the orthodox notion of it. In that caſe, it is no wonder they have ſo little ſcruple about it.

ting

ting the juſtice of appointing eſtabliſh-ments to guard them; to a ſentence which would proceed upon theſe eſtabliſhments as principles, there ought certainly, at leaſt in a proteſtant country, to be a previous queſtion. Every new ſcruple ought to lead us back to our foundations, and make us, firſt of all, review the rules by which our judgments are to be directed. In the preſent proſecution there were alſo peculiar circumſtances, which diſgraced the cauſe, and covered the actors with odium.

It was the more neceſſary to vindicate Mr. Ferguſſon in this point, not only as it is a piece of juſtice due from every friend of truth to a man who has made ſo diſintereſted an appearance in defence of a common cauſe; but alſo that others might not be deterred, by the treatment he has met with, from ſpeaking out on the ſame ſide. Who will ever venture to declare his ſentiments for the future upon the ſubject, if his name is to be blackened, and his character ſeized upon and torn by the invenomed mouth of every deſperate

bigot to eſtabliſhment? This would at once put a ſtop to all reformation, and chain us down for ever at the feet of ſuperſtition and ignorance.

Here, therefore, I might ſtop, having ſtated every thing which is neceſſary to the argument. A few lines more, and I have done.

There remains, then, only the firſt part of our ſubſcription in the orthodox ſenſe of it, *viz.* conſidered as a declaration of preſent belief upon the foundation of the Formula of 1711.—It may be ſtill farther enquired whether a man can ſubſcribe in this ſenſe, and yet not believe every propoſition ſo ſubſcribed, without being guilty of diſſimulation?

Mr. A. B.'s advocates have puſhed the argument into this ground, and the orthodox have been eager to engage them on it. Impreſſed with the hardſhip of a particular ſubſcription, and ſeeing it to be a manifeſt departure from proteſtant principles; theſe gentlemen have, in my opinion, carried their concluſions, in this inſtance, a ſtep farther than was requiſite.

They have aſſerted that both clauſes of our Formula, in the orthodox ſenſe of them, imply an inconſiſtency; and that every part of a proteſtant ſubſcription is, in its own nature, *qualified*. That every ſuch ſubſcription *ought* to be qualified, I admit; but that our ſubſcription, as ſettled by the Formula of 1711, is, in fact, thus qualified, in both its parts, I am ſorry to confeſs appears to me to be untenable. The ſecond clauſe indeed, is qualified, and muſt be qualified, becauſe otherwiſe it is nonſenſe; but the firſt is not followed with this conſequence. It may be ſenſe, and, at the ſame time, abſolute.—I agree, however, with theſe writers thus far. Though I cannot adopt their opinion conſidered as a general propoſition, I believe that the matter of fact they mention often actually happens. I have the charity to think that many ſubſcribe theſe articles, even through the medium of the Formula, who believe not every propoſition which they ſubſcribe, and yet cannot be charged with diſſimulation.—But inſtead of defending a practice

tice which is rather to be lamented, and which I would not recommend; I ſhall here, chiefly with a view of expoſing the preſent public ſtate of religion in this kingdom, and the pernicious conſequences of abſolute eſtabliſhments in a proteſtant country, give a ſhort account of religious *Teſts*, and ſo conclude this article.

It may be laid down as a firſt principle, that every ſociety is the ultimate judge of what members ſhe will admit into her communion. The terms of admiſſion are in *her* power, and *ſhe* is the ſupreme adminiſtrator, as well as maker of her own rules and conſtitutions. There is this difference, however, between a religious ſociety, and every other. A religious ſociety, as *ſuch*, is ſuppoſed to act merely from principles of *conſcience*; any other ſociety may be conſtituted likewiſe on other principles. The terms of admiſſion, therefore, into a religious ſociety, are never to be regarded as *political*. They are always ſuppoſed to be founded on the real ſentiments of the ſociety. On this principle, and this only, ſo far as it regards

gards the ſociety, they are formed into conſtitutions. Government, on *her* ſide, may, indeed, have other views; the ſociety, on *hers*, never can. From this principle it follows, that the actual, requiſite qualifications of an intrant into a religious ſociety are, that his real ſentiments be conformable, in every eſſential circumſtance, to the real ſentiments of the members with whom he is deſirous to aſſociate. This is all the ſociety can demand on *their* part; it is all that the candidate can offer on *his*: and, if they are ſatisfied of this conformity, they cannot, in *conſcience*, refuſe him a place among them. Neither can they in *fact*. For, if his religious opinions are really conformable to theirs, he is *actually*, though he never ſhould be *formally*, a member of their ſociety already. Indeed they might exclude him upon principles of *policy*. But principles of this kind have no place in a religious conſtitution. It is injurious to ſuch a conſtitution, in the higheſt degree, ſo much as to ſuppoſe their exiſtence.

Now,

Now, how are the members of ſuch a ſociety to know when the religious opinions of a candidate are conformable to theirs? *One* method of knowing this is by propoſing *Teſts* and *Confeſſions* of Faith, and requiring his aſſent to them. The end, therefore, of theſe is that thoſe who are already members of the ſociety may know whether the opinions of the candidates are the ſame with *theirs*; and, conſequently, whether, in a religious light, it is proper to admit him among them. Confeſſions and Teſts, therefore, are only *means* with reſpect to an *end*. It follows—

In a *political* light, they may be indiſpenſible; in a religious light, they are not. The members of a religious ſociety may have various other *means* of attaining the ſame *end*. This of ſubſcribing is only *one* mean. If the *end* be anſwered independent of it, the buſineſs is actually over; and, in a court of *conſcience*, this *mean* is, in ſuch a caſe, utterly ſuperfluous, and, in *fact*, ſuperſeded. It follows alſo—

That

That the members of the ſociety *themſelves* are always ſuppoſed to believe thoſe tenets to which they require the aſſent of the candidate. If they do not, ſuch *Teſts* and *Confeſſions* ceaſe to be a *mean* to attain the above-mentioned religious *end*. As a court of *conſcience*, therefore, they muſt fall upon *other* means; and, if they ſtill continue to propoſe theſe Teſts and Confeſſions, it muſt be from ſome other motives, and in ſome other capacity.

Now, to make this whole tranſaction the plainer, I will ſuppoſe, and I leave my readers to make the application, that the members of a religious ſociety range their own opinions into the form of a Teſt, and propoſe it to candidates with this view. I will even ſuppoſe them ſo fond of theſe opinions as to make acts themſelves, and apply to government to make other acts, confirming, or rather encouraging theſe their opinions by temporal motives, and handing them down, in this form, to their poſterity. Advert.—Their poſterity could only receive theſe conſtitutions, as coming from their fathers,

thers, in a *political* light. They would receive them from *government*, not from the *church*; for, in a religious light, one court of conſcience has not the ſmalleſt connection with another, nor is at all bound by any of its inſtitutions. Nay, ſuppoſe two courts, compoſed of the ſame individual members, the one ſitting this day and the other to-morrow, the ſame reaſoning would hold, and be juſt in its full extent.

But let us proceed with our ſuppoſitions. Conceive that, by the lapſe of years, and revolutions of knowledge, circumſtances come to be ſo totally changed that the religious ſentiments of the preſent members of this ſame ſociety are entirely different from the ſentiments of thoſe members who compoſed the Teſt we have mentioned. Mark the conſequences.

It is evident, firſt of all, that though it may ſtill retain the ſame name, it is, in *fact*, a quite different ſociety from the former.

It is alſo evident, however, that it poſſeſſes the ſame power of admitting candi-

dates,

dates, and in as ample a degree, as the former ſociety. It poſſeſſes this power in right of its being a ſociety.

Farther, the terms of admiſſion into this ſociety are preciſely the ſame with the terms of admiſſion into the former ſociety, viz. a conformity of ſentiment in the candidate with the ſentiments of the members. In a religious ſociety there can poſſibly be no other terms. If *his* ſentiments are the ſame with *theirs*, he is already, in *fact*, a member of *their ſociety*; and the declaring him ſuch is but a political *formality*. This circumſtance has no connection with the ſociety in a religious light.

But how is the ſociety to judge of this conformity? The teſt is no longer a *mean* for this purpoſe. The opinions of the ſociety are *now* entirely different from thoſe propoſed there. It would be idle, therefore, in a religious light, to meaſure the ſentiments of the candidate by *that*. You may, with as much propriety, and equal piety, propoſe the creed of *Japan* to him.

It is not my buſineſs, at preſent, to point out the various means which may be uſed, which actually are uſed, for this purpoſe. *Perſonal acquaintance*, and a courſe of *public probation*, will always, even without the help of *teſts*, enable the members of a ſociety to judge whether a candidate is a fit perſon to be received among them. Theſe, in fact, at this day go a greater length in determining an affair of this nature, and it is moſt religiouſly reaſonable they ſhould, than any other means which human thought has yet invented. Let us proceed.

The teſt, then, we will ſuppoſe, ſtill continues to be propoſed to candidates, though it is *now* evidently of no *uſe* to obtain the religious end propoſed by it. Candidates are admitted into the ſociety, as before, on account of the conformity of their opinions with thoſe of the preſent members, and from no other circumſtance. Upon theſe terms candidates muſt always be admitted in the nature of things. In a ſociety founded on ſentiment, we naturally will admit *him* a fellow

low member whoſe ſentiments are the ſame with ours. In a religious ſociety, we even cannot *refuſe* him without incurring guilt. The only objection which the members of ſuch a ſociety can have againſt aſſociating with any man, ſuppoſing the other parts of his character to be fair, is the difference of *his* ſentiments from *theirs*. Where this objection has no place, it would be *criminal* in them to refuſe his fellowſhip.

How, then, comes the teſt to be continued, ſeeing it is no longer of any uſe in a religious light? For a ſimilar reaſon with every other unrepealed act the force of which has gone into deſuetude. Motives of policy, perhaps indolence, poſſibly worſe principles, hinder us from applying for a repeal until the conſequences begin to be *felt*, as they ſeem to be in the preſent caſe. In the mean time, the ſociety conſiders it as a mere matter of *form*; and the notice paid it is regarded in no other light than as a compliment paid to the government.

A candidate preſents himſelf to this ſociety. The members of it find that his

religious opinions are preciſely the ſame with theirs; and that, in other reſpects, his character is unexceptionable. As a religious ſociety, they cannot, in *conſcience*, they cannot, without incurring an extreme degree of guilt, refuſe to admit this candidate. There is only one little ceremony, which cuſtom and our wiſe forefathers have entailed upon us, to be previouſly complied with. It is a matter of mere *form*. As a religious ſociety, you are a member with us already; this is only neceſſary, in a *political* light, to your being *formally* declared ſo. The teſt is preſented to him in this light. *They* underſtand *him*, and he underſtands *them*. The parties are in perfect *intelligence upon the point*. The candidate ſets his name to it without *heſitation*, perhaps without ſo much as giving himſelf the trouble to examine its contents. And this is the hiſtory of teſts *.

Where,

* In a paper of ingenious obſervations upon this tract which was ſent me from an unknown quarter, ſome objections were advanced againſt this part, drawn chiefly from the definition, the nature, and foundation

Where, then, is the diſſimulation? I ſay that neither of the parties is deceived. Where

foundations of a ſociety. The author, by taking the following explanations along with him, will ſee that his ideas and mine upon this ſubject are not ſo diſtant from each other as he ſeems to imagine.

1ſt, My deſign here is not to enquire into the foundations of particular religious ſocieties. I ſuppoſe that ſuch ſocieties are *conſtituted*, it matters not on what foundations. From this point I ſet out; and, proceeding upon their exiſtence as a matter of fact, I endeavour to ſhew what will actually be the conduct of their members. In ſhort, I am to be regarded here rather as an hiſtorian, than a philoſopher.

2dly, My argument has nothing to do with the definition of a ſociety. As little is it neceſſary for me to enter into the enquiry whether there can be a ſociety conſtituted purely on religious principles. It is ſufficient to my purpoſe that there are, in fact, aſſociations of men in the world which go under that name. Call them religious ſocieties, call them political, or both. I ſay, their actual principle of aſſociation is a ſimilarity of ſentiment; their apparent bond of connection is their own acts and forms. The fact ſeems to be, they are religious ſocieties at firſt, they become political ones afterwards.

3dly, But whatever may induce men to form aſſociations of this nature, or whatever name they may aſſume, or whether they can be juſtified; I agree with my annotator, and it is the principle I proceed upon,

Where nobody is deceived, there is no deception; where there is no deception, there

that there is this difference between a ſociety of this kind, and other ſocieties. In a ſociety which has religion for its object, whether it be a creature of the ſtate or not, no man can give up his rights, or ſurrender any part of his private liberty to the ſociety in lieu of any equivalent. Conſcience muſt ſtill continue to be the only principle. To ſuppoſe that they ceaſe to act from this principle, is to ſuppoſe that they ceaſe to act as Chriſtians. This hinders not but that other ſocieties may alſo act from conſcience. This ought never to be ſurrendered in *any* ſociety. In every ſociety, however, but this, there is a ſurrender made of ſomething. The difference is, that in *this* ſociety there is nothing elſe to ſurrender; and, conſequently, the members can ſurrender nothing.

4*thly*, Hence it follows that a ſimilarity of ſentiment is not only their principle of aſſociation, but that it *continues*, and in the very nature of the thing muſt continue, for ever, to be the real teſt of admiſſion into every ſuch ſociety.—Still, however, I enquire not whether, as Chriſtians, we have a right to propoſe even our own ſentiments as teſts, or to refuſe to aſſociate with thoſe who differ from us. All I notice is the matter of fact. If we think it our duty at all to meaſure the opinions of the candidate, our own ſentiments will be the actual ſtandard. It will be the ſtandard which conſcience recommends, if a ſtandard ſhall be thought neceſſary. If the ſentiments of the candidate

there is no diſſimulation. Now in the anſwer that is to be written to this, let us have no ſchool diſtinctions introduced here—I mean between the words deception and diſſimulation. Between the ſociety and the candidate, you ſee, every thing is fair. There is no deception on either ſide. The whole tranſaction is become a mere matter of political *form*. It

candidate agree with this, we cannot conſcientiouſly reject him. At the ſame time, we may poſſibly have no ſcruples to admit him though they do not.

5thly, This hiſtory furniſhes us with an additional argument againſt our preſent eſtabliſhments. From this account it is plain, that to take the ſentiments of any ſuch ſociety, at any particular period, and erect them into a perpetual *teſt*, is abſurd, and can never be carried into effect. The *original* teſt muſt ſtill continue to be the *real* one; and the other, as the ſentiments of the ſociety change, paſſes into a mere *formality*. From this view of things, which, I repeat again, is nothing but a *hiſtory*, in what a ſtrange ſituation muſt ſuch a ſociety, when it arrives at this point, find itſelf! fluctuating between policy and conſcience, law and duty! Hence the exiſtence of factions, religious diſcord, animoſity, hereſy proceſſes, and all the other evils which follow in the train of eſtabliſhment, and call louder and louder, as at this day, for a reformation.

is no longer conſidered as having any connection with the ſociety in a religious light. If there be any appearance of deception in the caſe, it is between the ſociety and the government as they ſtand connected in a *political* light. On whom does the blame of this rebound? On thoſe members of the ſociety who have it in their power to cure the diſeaſe radically, and will not.

The argument ariſing from the whole, and which ſeems to put the innocence of this tranſaction beyond doubt, is this. Matters are now in ſuch a ſituation that it would be poſitively *criminal* in *either* party to act differently. If the religious ſentiments of the candidate be really the ſame with *theirs*, the members of the ſociety cannot, without *guilt*, refuſe him, whether his opinions are the ſame with thoſe of the confeſſion or not. On the other hand, it would be highly criminal in the candidate, and what he could not anſwer to his own conſcience, were he to refuſe compliance with this ceremony in caſe it ſhould be inſiſted on. It would be

incapacitating himſelf to be *uſeful*, becauſe his forefathers were *unreaſonable*. I reaſon thus then. If it would be criminal *not* to do the thing, it cannot be criminal to do it. The tranſaction cannot be criminal on *both* ſides.

But to put this matter beyond exception, the candidate may, if he is ſcrupulous, declare, *viva voce*, when this teſt is propoſed to him, that he believes every article in it—as firmly as the ſociety doth. He may even go a ſtep farther. He may declare particularly what parts of it he excepts againſt; and, if this be alſo the ſenſe of the members, and they be men of conſcience, and act upon pure religious principles, they cannot reject him *.

From this reaſoning, which is little elſe but a plain hiſtory of facts, we are

* Whether our preſent eſtabliſhments be conſtituted upon principles purely religious or not, one thing is certain—their members ought always, in fact, to act upon ſuch principles. They never can be ſuppoſed to act upon any other.—This concluſion, evident in itſelf, ſtands upon this foundation—that no man ſurrenders any of his religious rights by becoming a member of ſuch eſtabliſhments.

furniſhed

furniſhed with another anſwer to an objection commonly inſiſted on by the oppoſite party. When it was aſſerted that nobody ought to ſubſcribe the Confeſſion but in ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures; it was loudly urged in oppoſition that, with this qualification, we might ſubſcribe the Turkiſh Coran. The anſwer we now give is,—and ſo we may. Suppoſe a religious ſociety in the circumſtances we have deſcribed, the *teſt* has juſt as much connection with it as the Turkiſh Coran; and, if the ſtate ſo pleaſed, we might ſubſcribe the one with equal propriety as the other. The admiſſion of candidates, if the ſociety act according to *conſcience*, depends juſt as much upon the one as upon the other. The ſociety cannot, in *conſcience*, refuſe to admit a candidate though there ſhould be five hundred teſts in his way, and all of them unrepealed, if he poſſeſſes the requiſite qualifications. Theſe qualifications are no more nor leſs than this, that his religious ſentiments be the ſame with thoſe of the preſent members of the

ſociety.

ſociety. Nor need any be afraid that this is too eaſy a term of admittance, or that it will be productive of abuſes. This always actually was the term of admittance, and always will be. The members of the ſociety are at all times equally its guardians. It belongs to *them* to watch over its welfare, and they will do it. They will always take equal care to admit none but proper members, that is, none but ſuch as are of *their* way of thinking; and they could do no more when the teſt was in force. The affair always, in fact, depended upon *them*. Abuſes may be committed, but not more *now* than formerly.

It muſt, however, be farther obſerved, that, in a religious ſociety ſo circumſtanced, the *teſt*, though, in fact, gone into deſuetude, will be productive of violent animoſities among the members. When I mentioned the opinions of the ſociety as entirely altered, I meant only the *majority* of the ſociety. There will always be ſome who will adhere to the old opinions. Theſe will act from vari-

ous

ous motives. As in every other faction, ſo here; ſome are weak, others deſigning. Some will adhere to them really from principle, others from motives of intereſt, of ambition, or of policy. Between theſe parties the ſociety will be thrown into convulſions. The old party will, however, for ſome time have every advantage on their ſide. Reformation muſt be either violent, or ſlow. If the latter, its partizans are expoſed for a long time to all the perils which attend innovation, when oppoſed by confirmed prejudices, and theſe prejudices awakened by deſigning men, inflamed by popular oratory, and ſecured by law and conſtitution. The reformers muſt expect to encounter all the rigour of authority, and every ſpecies of abuſe. At laſt, however, numbers will carry it.

It is really entertaining to hear the arguments of the oppoſite party. "Why," ſay they, "complain of the *teſt?* If it does not pleaſe, let it alone. We force it not upon you. Seek ſome other occupation. The church puts no violence on

any

any man." The *church*—This puts me in mind of an argument uſed by the Seceders when they firſt broke off from us. It was objected to them that it was certainly a crime to make diviſions by ſeparating from the church. "We deny that *we* ſeparated," replied they. "It was *they* who ſeparated from *us*. *We* are the *church*," cried the Seceders.—In like manner *now* ſay the orthodox—"*We* are the *church*."

End of the Second Part.

PART

PART III.

WE ſhall ſtop here, and take a review of the whole preceding reaſoning, and collect the moſt material inferences which ariſe from it into diſtinct, general concluſions.

I have long entertained a ſuſpicion that religious conſtitutions of all kinds are animated by the ſame ſpirit; and the behaviour of the conſtitutionaliſts of our church, on this occaſion, has not had the effect to diminiſh it. There was a time, however, when the church of Scotland was an exception. It was at the reformation. The records of thoſe times ſtill inform us that, if at any time it happened that a probationer, or miniſter, or any man, had any ſcruples with regard to any articles of the Confeſſion then in uſe, he ſhould be reaſoned with by proper perſons; that they ſhould, previous to every

other ſtep, deliberate with him upon the points conteſted, and endeavour to convince him. An offer is expreſly made, on the part of the church, to ſubmit the affair to enquiry. What is ſtill ſtronger, it is particularly and publickly promiſed that if, on the contrary, *he* ſhould be able to convince *them* of error in any article, that article ſhould be amended. Such was the temper of our church in theſe times. But then it was the period of the reformation. That circumſtance accounts for it. The ſpirit of conſtitution had not yet begun to operate. Our noble reformers had themſelves but juſt eſcaped from the conſtitutions of Rome. They ſaw the danger, and had ſenſe to make the application. They were ſenſible that they could take no other method conſiſtently with the principles on which they themſelves had ſeparated from that church. But this view was ſoon loſt. The conſtitution grew ſtrong, and the old ſpirit, inſeparable from it, revived. It has long predominated in its full force. Human affairs have an invariable *routine*. *They*

reformed,

reformed, that *we* might perſecute; and this, again, muſt end in a farther reformation.

I beg leave to mention the preſent method of eccleſiaſtical procedure. After the ceremony of a little private converſation with the libeller, the firſt ſtep that is taken with a member ſuſpected of hereſy is to preſent him with a libel. In this libel he is charged with denying certain *truths*. They next find this libel relevant—that is, they decree that theſe *truths* are *truths*, becauſe our ſtandards call them *truths*; and, therefore, that the denial of them infers puniſhment. If the pannel, then, ſhall be found guilty of the crime of denying *theſe*,—for a crime they will have it to be—he muſt be puniſhed. The only ſtep that *now* remains is to prove that he *has* denied theſe, and, accordingly, he *is* puniſhed. They call this acting according to the *conſtitution*. Their conſcience cannot ſuffer them to depart from the *conſtitution*. Nay, I have known miniſters, ſenſible men too, who though they were

convinced

convinced that no *truths* had been denied, no *crimes* committed, and ſcrupled not to avow as much in their private converſation; yet, in a *court*, they reaſoned, inſiſted, voted, that this ſame pannel deſerved cenſure, ſuſpenſion, depoſition;—for what? For denying *falſehoods* which the conſtitution forbad to be denied, for affirming *truths* which the conſtitution forbad to be affirmed; and they cenſured, ſuſpended, or depoſed him accordingly. And all this they call acting according to the conſtitution. The man is innocent, he has even acted laudably. But then the conſtitution, the conſtitution. Still they inſiſt upon the conſtitution. Their hands are bound down by the conſtitution. This ſame conſtitution muſt certainly be a very curious conſtitution which ſets a man's duty and his * conſcience ſo miſerably at variance. It would appear that, by the conſtitution of the church of Scotland, as it ſtands at preſent, all the moral virtues are confined to *private* Chriſtians.

* This is a diſtinction in morals diſcovered by the light of confeſſions, and not by metaphyſics.

In the firſt part of the foregoing conſiderations, I have endeavoured to direct the attention of the public upon the proper point of debate. I have ſhewn that, with regard to particular inſtances, Mr. Ferguſſon, or any perſon in his ſituation, is not to be judged by precedents or acts of aſſembly; that there is the higheſt probability, in the preſent caſe particularly, that the doctrines which his anſwerers ſay he cenſures are really worthy of cenſure. *2dly*, And as a direct conſequence from this, that there appears to be a ſtrong neceſſity, at this time, and in very many articles, for a farther reformation.

To what is advanced there upon theſe points, I ſhall add very little here. It may be urged, if we are not to judge by the conſtitution in any caſe of this nature, what is the *end* of conſtitutions? The anſwer is, to be altered.

But it ſeems there would be no end of this. If we lay down rules, we muſt abide by them, and judge by them. Contrary to your own conſciences do you mean? It is in this manner, as the ſpirit of

of conſtitution gains ground, that the original views of reformation are loſt; and, from a court of *conſcience*, the members of eſtabliſhment degenerate into what may emphatically be called a *church court*.

It is amazing that the wiſe makers of our laws, among the numerous conſtitutions they have framed, did not ever think of making this one,—that, in every proceſs for hereſy, the previous queſtion ſhould be, "Whether the heretic or the church are in the right?"

This might have been done in the eaſieſt, and completeſt manner, ſimply by determining the proper point of relevancy; by putting the queſtion, not whether the alledged hereſy is nominally condemned by our ſtandards, which is the preſent practice; but whether it is really a hereſy, that is, whether it is contrary to the ſcriptures.

It might have been enacted, or rather there was no occaſion for enacting, it would have been the natural conſequence; that, whenever a caſe happened where the

opinion of the church was different from the ſpirit of any eſtabliſhed article, in any inſtance of this nature, that article ſhould be immediately amended. By this means the road of reformation would have been ſtill left open. In the preſent ſituation of affairs, it appears that we have but changed maſters; and that the dreaded authority of the court of Rome has only, in effect, been transferred to our Synods and committees. That neceſſity which made us proteſtants might have taught us, that there is not a more dangerous enemy of reaſon, there is not a greater abſurdity in religion, than a perpetual religious conſtitution. But reaſoning will be long employed to no purpoſe in this ſubject. Mankind muſt have an object to admire. Repeated experience only can undeceive them. The idea of infallibility has not been eraſed from the human mind by all the blood of the martyrs.

Two primary principles ought to have been laid down as the foundations of every proteſtant church. 1*ſt*, That in all church proceſſes an appeal ſhould lie

from *conſtitution* to *conſcience*? 2*dly*, That, wherever there is foundation for ſuch an appeal, there is a neceſſity for a reformation in the conſtitution.

When I ſay, however, that theſe principles ought to have been the foundations of every proteſtant church, I mean they ought to have been enacted and expreſſed. For, in *fact*, they are the foundations of every church, they are the principles of every honeſt man, and can be ſet aſide by no human conſtitution.

In the ſecond part I have treated a point, not perhaps in itſelf ſo important as the former, but of more immediate conſequence, the point of ſubſcription. I hope the orthodox party will pay particular attention to this part. They are againſt a reformation, and I have furniſhed them, inadvertently, led imperceptibly to it by a chain of human reaſoning, with an argument for their cauſe. There is no retreat *now*. *Morality* muſt take the conſequence. In ſhort, I have endeavoured to ſhew that our preſent conſtitution is

not, in fact, ſo bad as it is generally thought to be.

It is generally thought, for inſtance, that it is poſitively required by the conſtitution, as an indiſpenſable qualification, without which a man cannot be admitted to be a miniſter of the eſtabliſhed church of Scotland,—"That he be as *ignorant* as his predeceſſors and forefathers were, at leaſt, 200 years ago."

It is generally thought that the intention of taking *tryals* is to determine whether the candidate poſſeſſes this preciſe degree of ignorance.

That his *licence* is a ſolemn atteſtation, from a qualified court, certifying all whom it may concern, that the probationer has, upon trial, been found *thus* ignorant; and, conſequently, is very well qualified to preach the goſpel of Chriſt in any part of *Scotland*.

It is thought to be a neceſſary condition of his *continuing* in the church, even after he has been found ſufficiently ignorant to be *admitted* into it, that he *continue* alſo in

in the ſame ſtate of *ignorance*, invariably, in which his ſuperiors found him:

That, upon the firſt ſymptom of his having made the ſmalleſt addition to his original ſtock of knowledge, it becomes the *duty* of the church inſtantly to expel him from their ſociety:

That, in that ſame terrible event, upon the firſt diſcovery he makes of it himſelf, he is alſo, on *his* part, bound, in *conſcience*, and of his own accord, to leave their ſociety.

Provided always that this law extend only to his departing from the *ſtandard* in *one* direction, that is to ſay, to his becoming *leſs* ignorant; and that it be not explained to extend alſo to his departing from it in the *other* direction, that is to ſay, to his becoming *more* ignorant; which it is always underſtood he is at full liberty to do, without incurring any of the aforeſaid penalties.

It may be obſerved here, in paſſing, that the non-obſervance of this law, in its ſtrict acceptation, is the ſource of the great diviſion which obtains, at this day,

in our church. Thoſe of our clergy who have the *preſumption* to paſs the bound in the *culpable* direction, that is to ſay, to become more *knowing*, are diſtinguiſhed by the contemptuous appellation of *moral men*, or, if ejected on this account from their livings, of *heretics*. Thoſe, again, who, from a principle of *conſcience*, continue in the ſame degree of ignorance, or have the grace perhaps to make ſome additions—I mean of ignorance—to it, we call the *orthodox*.

Hence we may arrive at a juſt definition of theſe two parties.

But, were this law ſtrictly put in execution, we never could have any diviſion in our church. All would be orthodox.

This moſt deſirable event is what the godly ſigh after, both night and day, with many tears, and prayers to almighty God—though hitherto to no purpoſe. It is alſo the end which our conſtitutionaliſts keep perpetually in their view, and the primary intention, no doubt, of all our hereſy proceſſes.

And

And theſe, they ſay, are the original principles of our eccleſiaſtical conſtitution. Moſt deteſtable principles verily.

To refute theſe is the deſign of the ſecond part of theſe conſiderations.—Without reſuming the diſpute concerning the authority of our preſent Formula; if the reaſoning I have there employed be juſt, even upon the foundation of that Formula itſelf, two moſt important conſequences follow.—

1*ſt*, That any miniſter, or probationer, who ſubſcribes the Confeſſion of Faith, is at full liberty, notwithſtanding, to exerciſe his faculties in the ſearch of truth; and may change his mind, upon conviction, and even publiſh this change to the world, without being under any obligation, from his ſubſcription, to leave the church.

2*dly*, That, in any inſtance of this kind, no church judicatory is under any obligation, from that ſubſcription, to inflict any cenſure.

I ſubmit theſe two propoſitions to the examination of the public. I acknowledge I ſhould be ſorry to ſee my reaſonings

ings upon them refuted. They are principles truly proteſtant, and ours is a proteſtant church. I am convinced in my own mind of their truth, and, I hope, multitudes beſides in this kingdom. Forbid it, heaven! that ſo great a diſgrace ſhould ever befal our church as that principles like theſe ſhould not find ſtrenuous defenders.

The proof of them depends upon an extremely ſimple principle. It is this. No ſubſcriber can mean, he cannot, in fact, be thought by thoſe who require his ſubſcription, or by any body, to mean, to promiſe, or engage, in any ſenſe, to continue to believe what he then believes. Let this principle be canvaſſed on all ſides. If it is juſt, let us then be told where the obligation lies, upon the one party to relinquiſh the ſociety of which he is, by that act, admitted a member, or upon the other party to expel him, upon the change of his opinions, from among them.

I am aware that there is a promiſe of *adherence* made by the ſubſcriber. It is expreſſed in the Formula, and required from every miniſter of this church at his ordina-

ordination.—I have already given my opinion of this promiſe. Conſidered in itſelf, it can mean nothing but an engagement of honeſty. This, in fact, was its original intention; nor does it appear, even though their opinion were of any conſequence in the argument, that the impoſers of our preſent Formula had any other reaſon for inſerting it but becauſe it had been in uſe to make part of our religious engagements. The orthodox, in every part of this diſpute, are reduced to a dilemma. The impoſers of our Formula either examined this clauſe, or they did not examine it. If they examined it, they muſt have underſtood it in its original ſenſe, becauſe they have tranſmitted it to us without the ſmalleſt alteration. If they did not examine it, we have a right to explain it. Again, upon ſuppoſition that they did examine it, they muſt either have ſeen the abſurdity implied in the preſent orthodox ſenſe of it, or not. If they ſaw this abſurdity, then they have not tranſmitted it to us in that ſenſe. If they did not ſee this abſurdity, and meant it as an engagement to

to leave the church upon a change of ſentiment, they would undoubtedly have expreſſed this in ſuch a manner as to leave no room for ambiguity. This was a point on which they could never be too explicit. The truth is, as it appears to me, they have never conſidered it at all. Intent upon the firſt part of the Formula, and the rendering our ſubſcription particular; they have engroſſed the ſecond in courſe of *form*, and tranſmitted it, in bulk, as they received it.

It is the more neceſſary to ſettle theſe two points, becauſe, unleſs they can be ſettled, we have a moſt melancholy proſpect before us. Unleſs theſe points be eſtabliſhed, let our church be ever ſo depraved, let her even become more corrupt than the church of Rome, we muſt deſpair of ever ſeeing a reformation. On the other hand, if theſe points can be eſtabliſhed, in the firſt place it is ſettling a moſt important part of our religious conſtitution; and, ſecondly, it is opening the road to reformation, by knocking off thoſe fetters upon ſentiment which bound

men

men down, and prevented them from declaring their opinions. Now, therefore, is the time for all the friends of religious liberty to ſtand forth, and aſſert their rights, as men, as chriſtians, and as members of the church of Scotland.

A man of reflection is aſtoniſhed and grieved to hear the reaſonings which at preſent prevail on this ſubject throughout the kingdom. That an amendment is, in many points, deſirable, is very readily acknowledged. You will meet with people in every company who will not ſcruple to affirm, that our rules of ſubſcription are grievous, that the tenets which we ſubſcribe are many of them dubious, and others of them manifeſtly erroneous. To hear theſe people reaſon, to read their writings, you would conclude that they were waiting, with impatience, for a favourable opportunity to begin a reformation. They have nothing leſs, however, in their intentions. Suppoſe them to be clergymen, and that you put the queſtion to them;

Some

Some of them will demurely tell you that, in the preſent circumſtances of affairs, a reformation can never, with propriety, begin from the church: that no Clergyman could with any decency make ſuch an overture: that it muſt come, if it come at all, from the Laity, or from the State. How aſtoniſhing is this! how miſerable our caſe if this be true! That the *clergy*, the very men who ought to take the *lead* in a religious reformation, cannot, be the neceſſity ever ſo urgent, do it with propriety. I well know it is a fact, that reformation never *has* begun from the church: it has been always forced upon them from ſome other quarter. But I did not expect to hear this ſcandal upon the ſacerdotal character *defended!*—good God! and by proteſtant clergymen!

Some ſcruple muſt lurk at the bottom of this, ſome falſe principle which it is neceſſary to detect. It is no other than the abaſing one which has been already mentioned,—that a clergyman, by the act of ſubſcribing, is bound down, under the ſevereſt penalties, to the ſame opi-

nions; that it would be diſgraceful in him to attack doctrines which he had formerly ſubſcribed; or to attempt any innovations, however neceſſary, in the conſtitution of that church whoſe regulations he, at the ſame time, in fact acknowledges by ſtill continuing her member.

To ſhew that this principle is unreaſonable, that it is abſurd, and fatal to religion, is an eaſy taſk. I have endeavoured to do more. I have attempted to ſhew that it has no foundation even in the conſtitution of our church. Every miniſter of the goſpel, every ſubſcriber, is as much at liberty to think for himſelf, to ſpeak his mind, and upon the conſtitution too, as any other man. He is not bound down to particular opinions; he may change his ſentiments, upon conviction, without ſcruple, without being accountable, merely for having changed them, to any juriſdiction, or in danger from any conſtitution. If, by ſo doing, he draw down upon himſelf cenſure from his eccleſiaſtical ſuperiors, ſuch cenſure is unreaſonable, unſcriptural, it is unconſtitutional, and an encroachment upon the religious rights of the

the church of Scotland. Why do we call the office venerable, and ſacred? Why do we dignify the character with the glorious epithets of teacher of the people, and miniſter of Chriſt; if a clergyman, whoſe office requires him to be the moſt enlightened, is, in fact, the only perſon of his ſociety who is denied the right of private judgment? The poſition is abſurd, and incredible. A ſtranger to Popiſh conſtitutions could never comprehend this aſſertion,—that a miniſter of the goſpel is, by the very nature of his office, deprived of a privilege which is enjoyed by the moſt illiterate of his hearers;—that an expoſitor of the ſcriptures is, by the very conditions on which he is admitted to be an expoſitor, ſhut up from all the lights which can alone enable him to expound them with accuracy. Though my reaſonings upon the point ſhould have the misfortune to be unſatisfactory, the abſurdity of theſe conſequences in themſelves will ſtrike. Such a cauſe, ſo intereſting, ſo reaſonable, ſo agreeable to the firſt principles of common ſenſe, will raiſe a ſuc-

ſucceſſion of defenders. One chain of reaſoning will be no ſooner laid aſide, than new, and abler arguments will be adduced, and the oppoſition muſt be finally confounded.

But here a ſtaunch conſtitutionaliſt, who, from the beginning of this diſcourſe, has been lying upon the watch to ſeize upon ſome weak link of an argument, replies, —Your reaſoning proves too much. If every miniſter, after ſubſcription, may change his opinions at pleaſure, without danger from the conſtitution; our clergy may, if intereſt or inclination ſo direct them, embrace the doctrines and regulations eſtabliſhed by the council of Trent, and the church of Scotland fall finally back to popery.

To this formidable objection I muſt attempt ſome anſwer. In the firſt place, it is a falſe principle, allowing the fact, that, becauſe an argument proves too much, therefore it proves nothing. *2dly*, That cauſe muſt be bad which cannot be defended but by ſuppoſitions which never can take place in fact. Now the preſent

is one of theſe. For the church of Scotland, nor any proteſtant church, never can return to popery by *this* road. Tell me, gentlemen! Do you really think that freedom of religious enquiry leads to popery? To ſpeak freely, were one to judge from the precautions which you take againſt it, and the endeavours you exert to oppreſs it, one would be tempted to believe that you really entertained this opinion. I have, however, an invincible prejudice that freedom of religious enquiry will, on the contrary, lead us ſtill farther from popery. I am even of opinion that it is the direct road to truth, and public utility. The fettering the minds of men by arbitrary conſtitutions, the taking every method to ſecure implicit faith to the doctrines of the church, the making it for our temporal intereſt to believe them whether true or falſe, the ſtifling all contrary opinions, and diſcouraging all enquiry, by exertions of high eccleſiaſtical authority; *theſe* have a greater reſemblance of popery, and theſe are the ſteps which *you* are taking. Freedom of enquiry,

enquiry, where there is no *intereſt* to biaſs it, and there would be none but for your ridiculous regulations, will lead to truth, to utility, and to chriſtian charity.

I find it is neceſſary to explain myſelf. My concluſion is not that a church has no authority with regard to the religious opinions of her members. The queſtion with me is, where this authority is lodged. You aſſert that it lies in the conſtitutions; I ſay it is lodged in the members. It is *you*, therefore, who rob the church of her authority. You ſay that, let the private ſentiments of the members be what they will, every one of them is bound, by the original conſtitutions of the church, to defend a certain ſet of opinions, and to puniſh thoſe who may oppoſe them. I ſay that our church knows no ſuch conſtitutions. I have endeavoured to vindicate to her members a right which they had no power to give away; and which, in fact, they have not given away; —the right of voting in a church-court, not according to conſtitutions which have no exiſtence, but according to their conſciences. As a ſociety, I ſtill allow

them a power of meeting judicially, of taking cognizance of hereſies, and of giving ſentence; but I ſay they are under no obligation, from any conſtitutions now exiſting, not to give this ſentence, as miniſters of Chriſt ought to do, according to their own ſentiments. This is a power which will never be given up; it will never be diſputed by any intelligent, honeſt man. Let this point of our religious conſtitution, therefore, be ſettled; let this power, the precious right of every miniſter of the goſpel, be eſtabliſhed. Its nature and extent, will be matter of ſubſequent enquiry.

From an abſurd conſequence it has always been allowable to infer a falſe principle. That a religious reformation can never with propriety begin from the church, is evidently, when conſidered in itſelf, as abſurd an aſſertion as ever was made. Yet, if the principle which ſupports it be juſt, it is no more than the truth. If a clergyman is obliged, by the very conditions of his admiſſion, to leave the church; and if the church is obliged, by

by the ſame conditions, incontinently to expel him, upon his change of opinions, from their ſociety; it is a moſt undoubted truth that a reformation never can, with propriety, come from the church: and, if ſuch be the ſtate of things, we may venture to predict that it never, in *fact*, will come from the church. It is, therefore, infinitely more probable that the principle on which it is eſtabliſhed is falſe than that ſo abſurd a concluſion ſhould be true. I hope I have ſhewn that it actually is falſe, and without foundation. I have endeavoured to ſhew that the church is the very place from which a reformation ought to begin; and people of plain common ſenſe, and unacquainted with the reaſonings of church-men, will, I am afraid, be apt to think that I have eſtabliſhed no very intricate point after all.

There are others again who reaſon in a different manner. They will tell you that, as churchmen, they are to be conſidered as the ſervants of the ſtate: that the ſtate, upon their admiſſion to the office of the miniſtry, gives them a certain

ſet of opinions, which opinions they bind themſelves to teach the people: that they hold their benefices, and their characters as miniſters of the church of Scotland, upon this expreſs condition: that the ſtate has abſolutely determined that theſe opinions, and no other, ſhall be taught: that ſubſcription is to be conſidered in the light of a ſecurity which the ſtate exacts from the eſtabliſhed church of this kingdom in return for her protection: and that the ſtate has a right to cauſe the terms to be obſerved on which this protection is afforded. They will tell you that, conſidered in this view, conſcience has no concern in this whole affair: that this particular ſet of opinions, be they true or falſe, is thought, both by church and ſtate, to be beſt adapted to the people: that, upon this account *only*, the clergy engage to teach them; and that ſubſcription is nothing leſs or more than a ſecurity which the one political body gives the other for this purpoſe.

I am apprehenſive it will not be eaſy to impel men who reaſon in this manner

to

to a reformation. The only motives we can hope will prevail with an eſtabliſhed clergy to reform are conſcience, and a regard for character. In moſt other reſpects a reformation muſt generally be diſagreeable. But here both are dexterouſly ſhifted out of the argument. No topic is left to inſiſt upon but *utility*, and her very firſt maxim is "to let things ſtand as they are." It is eaſier, however, to confute political arguments upon the ſubject of religion than to convince the people who defend them. It would not be difficult to ſhew, if the ſhewing of it could have any effect, that every ſtep in this proceſs is falſe from beginning to end; and that thoſe chimerical, Warburtonian principles of alliance, which have been ſo often and ſo well exploded in theory, never, in *fact*, took place—at leaſt in this kingdom.

Though the taking up the argument in this light might add new force to the oppoſition which has been made to that theory, yet to treat it with proper extent would much exceed the limits of a diſ-

courſe which is already, perhaps, too long, and might poſſibly at this day be even ſuperfluous. I ſhall here notice only one point. The terms of ſubſcription, the manner of it, the words which we ſubſcribe, are totally inconſiſtent, and irreconcileable with this ſenſe. We ſubſcribe theſe articles as articles of preſent belief. This is evident from every circumſtance attending our preſent method of ſubſcription. It is the very hardſhip of which we hear ſuch loud and repeated complaints, from all quarters. Whoever aſſerts that the clergy of the eſtabliſhed church of Scotland ſubſcribe theſe articles as mere articles of peace, aſſerts an indiſputable falſehood. This is a hard expreſſion. I confeſs it is, and it gives me the more pain when I reflect upon the general characters of thoſe to whom it may be applicable. But if gentlemen will perſiſt in artfully eluding all attempts towards reformation, while they think themſelves ſheltered behind political principles, they muſt be undeceived. If they adduce untenable arguments, in ſupport of an indefenſible

defenſible conduct, they muſt expect to be contradicted. I have as much charity for the multitudes who, in the preſent diſtreſſing ſituation of affairs, are obliged to ſet their names to theſe articles, and who yet do not believe them all, as a Chriſtian ought to have. I have even given it as my opinion that they are not chargeable with diſſimulation, and produced the reaſons of that opinion. But theſe reaſons are of a very different nature from thoſe now mentioned. Inſtead of lulling our conſciences into ſecurity, and rendering us indifferent to reformation; they have a tendency to rouſe us from our lethargy, and impel us to deſtroy that unaccountable neceſſity which has rendered them juſtifiable. The whole repreſentation of the preſent ſtate of our religious affairs, upon which they are eſtabliſhed, is ſtrongly calculated to engage all parties, as well thoſe who are convinced by theſe reaſonings as thoſe who are not, to take every ſtep, and it is their indiſpenſable duty, to reſcue the proteſtant church of Scotland from that odd

ſituation

ſituation into which ſhe has brought herſelf; and to expel the remains of that church leaven which, by the inattention of our reformers, was ſuffered to lurk in her vitals, and has ſince fermented the whole maſs of her conſtitution.

But, ſuppoſing all parties to be convinced of the neceſſity of a reformation, there is one difficulty, and the greateſt difficulty of all, which ſtill remains. Some leading eccleſiaſtic, whoſe paſſions are exaſperated becauſe his judgment is convinced, will probably tell us that, in the preſent ſituation of the ſtate, and diſpoſitions of the people, ſuch a reformation is abſolutely impracticable.

If this be the caſe, we are indeed in a bad ſituation. We muſt continue to ſubſcribe our Confeſſion as we can, and to preach as we are enabled. Againſt the clamours of an inſolent faction we ſhall then have no remedy but to ſit in our own houſes, if they will allow us, and keep as much as poſſible out of hearing. We muſt fold our arms, and be ſilent.

And yet, when from this ſolitary poſt ſome warm-hearted man takes a view of the hopeleſs ſituation of affairs, he will probably be ſometimes obliged to lift his hand to his eye, and, with all his might, endeavour to ſuppreſs a burſt of grief and generous indignation, which will ſwell up, and force its way, in ſpite of all his efforts, at ſo lamentable a proſpect.

But have the leaders of our church ever made the experiment? It would be an intolerable queſtion to aſk if they have ever beſtowed a ſingle thought upon the project? Yet, unleſs they have made unſucceſsful efforts, unleſs they have at leaſt deliberated maturely, they can never pronounce ſo deſirable, ſo generous, ſo obviouſly neceſſary an attempt abſolutely chimerical.

I have heard of many attempts which have been made by the other party, ſome of them ſtill recent, to contract our Chriſtian liberty within ſtill narrower bounds than had been marked even by our original ſtandards. And they have all of them ſucceeded. Of theſe the introduction of

the

the Formula is one. Has there ever been any thing like this concerted, and put in motion by *us* for the generous purpoſe of extending it?

How indefatigable are *they* in building up the fabric of the eſtabliſhment? How watchful leaſt it ſhould receive any injury? How alert in intimidating the moſt diſtant approaches of hoſtility? How perſevering in their ſchemes of vengeance, and how artful in their methods of management? As the watchers in Old Jeruſalem went nightly round the walls, and counted the bulwarks; ſo our vigilant church guardians have alſo *their* nightly walks; they frequently count their eccleſiaſtical canons, and the articles of their confeſſions; to ſee that none of them be loſt, and that the exact number of religious impoſitions which have been piouſly tranſmitted down by our forefathers, be not at leaſt diminiſhed in *their* hands. They have eſtabliſhed themſelves into a regular *corps* of obſervation, in which every member poſſeſſes his proper ſtation, from the commander in chief downwards

—no

—no immenſe diſtance indeed—even to the *Drummer* *. When ſhall theſe workers upon church power meet with a proper oppoſition? We are ambitious of recording the actions of others, and can acquit ourſelves, in this province, with applauſe. Are none of us fired with the nobler ambition of acting ourſelves, of bearing an honourable part in the great revolutions which affect the moſt important intereſts of mankind, and tranſmitting our *own* names, an applauded ſubject of hiſtory, to the lateſt poſterity?

And, certainly, if there are any of us inſpired with theſe great reſolves, and have the ſteadineſs to carry them into execution, we cannot miſs our reward. I ſpeak not of the ſublime pleaſure which accompanies the conception of a generous purpoſe, of the teſtimony of conſcience, and the approbation of God. Theſe are topics which need not to be inſiſted on with thoſe who feel their force. Remoteſt generations will bleſs the men who enlarged

* This refers to the Drummer of Beith.—*Vide* Preface.

the

the extent of our religious liberty. The church of Scotland will remember them, with honour, as her ſecond great reformers; and, when the preſent prejudices are loſt, and the effects of their patriotic labours felt, their ſucceſſors, through every age, will kindle at their great names, and claſs them with the public benefactors of mankind.

I am ſenſible I have laid myſelf open to ridicule, by having propoſed ſuch motives of action, and entered ſo warmly into a *common* cauſe, in this venal age. But when I reflect upon thoſe for whoſe ſake principally I write, my apprehenſions are *mitigated*. One claſs of men will enter into views, and be directed by motives, which would be ridiculed by another. What temptation have the clergy of Scotland to depart from their duty? Excluded from the riches, from the power, and grandeur of this world; their principal enjoyments ariſe from the benevolence of their hearts, and the approbation of their conſciences. Having no intereſt of their own to occupy their affec-

tions,

tions, the public good is, with them, a real object of attention. The ſources of their happineſs lie in their own minds. Hence every ſcheme which is an object of reflection, is to them an object of importance; and, though it were only on theſe accounts, the order of ſociety, the applauſe of their own hearts, and the exertion of the diſintereſted affections, are dearer to *them* than to others. I may hope, therefore, that the urging them to public conduct, and by generous motives, is not improper, and will not be ineffectual. I may be ridiculed as a projector, but, ye watchers over the religious rights of mankind! ye ſervants of Jeſus! can the ridicule come from *you?*

To ſpeak deliberately to the preſent point.—The pretended plea of impracticability, with reſpect to the diſpoſitions of the ſtate and the people, depends upon two previous queſtions. Have the diſpotions of the ſtate ever been ſounded? Do the people entertain an opinion that they have a right to preſcribe to their teachers what terms of communion they ſhall uſe among

among themſelves in their own ſociety? It may next be conſidered whether the obſtacles ariſing from theſe two cauſes amount to an impracticability.

With regard to the ſtate,—ſuppoſing an application to this quarter neceſſary,—it would be as extraordinary a fact as ever was recorded in Hiſtory, if the parliament of Great Britain, in the 18th century, were to reject a reaſonable petition, from a national church, concerning a grievance of this nature, a grievance too, the conſequence of our own abſurd application. For it is very certain that the ſtate, when they admitted this application, thought they were gratifying the church. And they would gratify the church ſtill.

With regard to the people,—it is an affair in which they have ſmall concern. It is a point which reſpects their teachers among themſelves. But though inconveniencies were to be apprehended from this quarter, ought not greater inconveniencies than can be apprehended to be encountered on ſuch an occaſion? Is it not,

not, beſides, the duty of every miniſter of the goſpel to endeavour to conquer the prejudices of the people, and to ſet them right where they are wrong? Is not this a part of his office? But when, by the ſame ſtep, popular prejudices are to be conquered, and an inſufferable grievance removed from the clergy themſelves, this duty becomes doubly ſtrong; and I do not ſee how any conſcientious clergyman can go to his grave in peace without having concurred, at leaſt, in one general attempt for this purpoſe.

There is one argument which the advocates for religious eſtabliſhments in this kingdom commonly inſiſt on, and which is not more oppoſite to the ſpirit of chriſtianity, than it is deſtructive of the cauſe itſelf in ſupport of which it is adduced. It is that, as the temporalities of clergymen proceed ultimately from the people, and the people have a right to hear what miniſters are moſt agreeable to them; they have, conſequently, a right likewiſe to beſtow theſe temporalities upon what perſons they think proper, and the ſtate

does well to affirm it. The inevitable conſequence from this principle is, that the eſtabliſhed clergy of every country, inſtead of being, as their office and their religion require, the inſtructors, are, in fact, only the echoes of the people;—inſtead of enlightening the ignorant by the ſuperior knowledge which, as men of learning and preachers of the goſpel, they are ſuppoſed to poſſeſs, they themſelves are qualified for their office only by being found upon the level of *their* ideas, and can advance no doctrine which is not agreeable to the preconceived opinions of the multitude. Hence the very deſign of the paſtoral office is defeated, and an immoveable mound erected againſt improvement. Now if I were retained upon the ſide of eſtabliſhment, I would defend it upon the very oppoſite principle. I would contend that the great utility of a civil eſtabliſhment in religion is, that, by ſetting the clergy above want, and rendering them independent of the people, it puts them in a condition to diſcharge their office with fidelity, and to exert

their

their ſuperior abilities for the improvement of mankind. In this light, ſuch eſtabliſhments are certainly uſeful. This is, indeed, the only advantage I can recollect with which they are attended;—and it is defeated by ſubſcription *.

Mr. Dunlop, in his preface to a collection of confeſſions, has inſiſted on this argument, with a view to vindicate the church from the charge of perſecution. As he is the great champion for ſubſcription in this kingdom, I ſhall here take the liberty to preſent the public with a few extracts from him.

* So far from its being true that the clergy enjoy their benefices upon condition that they preach only what is agreeable to the people, I may paſs from the point of right to fact, and aſſert that the viſible effect of granting theſe benefices is to render them independent of the people in this very reſpect. This is a foundation which ought to be well eſtabliſhed, and which I would have attended to. Why elſe was the right of beſtowing theſe benefices not left in the people? Indeed, it muſt be owned, ſubſcription counteracts this end, and reduces the whole religious ſyſtem to anarchy. It is aſtoniſhing, could any thing aſtoniſh us which mere men have done in religion, how the ſame perſons could, and at the ſame time, promote two ſuch contrary inſtitutions.

"It may be alledged, ſays this artful writer, that how confidently ſoever we diſclaim perſecution for conſcience ſake, and an arbitrary impoſition upon the underſtandings of mankind; yet in fact we approve it, ſince we allow all *churches to depoſe their miniſters*, if they embrace opinions contrary to their public ſtandards, as a conſequence of which they are deprived of their *ſtipends*, that is their bread, and the only means of their livelihood, which ſeems to be a very great degree of perſecution."

And certainly it looks very like it. But let us hear how he makes out the negative.

"It were needleſs, continues he, to deny that a miniſter being thus deprived for departing from the eſtabliſhed confeſſion, is laid open to very great inconveniencies, and the want of his ſtipend is an important loſs to him:"—(Well, here is a very fair conceſſion. How, then, will he ſhew that this is not an hardſhip?)—"But, ſays he, we hope it will eaſily appear that there can be no ground to com-

complain of the church that turns him off, and that they do nothing in ſuch a caſe but what they have an undiſputed right to, and what is both reaſonable and neceſſary; if we conſider that a man is not thereby deprived of any thing that he hath a natural right to, or which he can claim as a member of the civil ſociety.— Every ſociety is maſter of its own favours; it is highly reaſonable that it ſhould beſtow them to the beſt ends, and upon thoſe perſons who appear fitteſt to promote them. This in religious matters is eſpecially neceſſary. The forming of a ſociety for religious purpoſes, is a voluntary act of thoſe who compoſe it: and when, according to what they think the nature of the thing and the commands of God oblige them to, public teachers are inſtituted among them; the qualifications of the perſons to be inveſted with that office, and the terms upon which they are to be admitted, and as a conſequence hereof are to enjoy the public maintainance which the church hath provided for her paſtors, muſt be ſubmitted to the

joint determination of the body: and as no man can intrude himſelf into an eccleſiaſtical office in that ſociety contrary to their inclinations, and the rules eſtabliſhed by them; ſo none can pretend to the public *ſalary* annexed to it, but in a conſiſtency therewith."—In a few words, "a clergyman who, (in conſequence of theſe principles having obtained the ſanction of the law in any country,) is deprived of his living, can in no juſtice complain, becauſe he knows that the very deſign of the ſociety in ſubmitting to him as their miniſter, and making ſuitable proviſion as to his temporal concerns, was that they might enjoy goſpel ordinances, and hear the word preached in a way agreeable to their conſciences."

There cannot be a more ſtriking inſtance of that ſpecious reaſoning which dazles without convincing than the argument before us. The ſhort anſwer to it is this. It pleads, with equal ſtrength, for a pagan as for a chriſtian eſtabliſhment. It is equally dexterous in the hands of a Papiſt as of a Proteſtant. It

is

is an argument for *any* eſtabliſhment, independent of truth and juſtice; and is as ſtrong, upon ſuppoſition that the opinions of the ſociety are oppoſite, as that they are agreeable to the ſcriptures. It proceeds upon this abſurd principle,—that, inſtead of the clergy being the teachers of the people, the people are in effect, the teachers of the clergy. Mr. Dunlop goes on:

"So little reaſon, ſays he, is there to call the abſtracting of the benefice from ſuch a man *perſecution*, that, on the contrary, the obliging them to continue it (which the principles of theſe pretended aſſerters of liberty lead to) were a very grievous oppreſſion, and an arbitrary impoſition." Moſt dexterouſly turned! "And it will ſoon appear how modeſt and reaſonable a demand they make, if we conſider that it plainly amounts to this, that a ſociety which gave you a right to a *ſtipend* upon a certain condition, ſhould be bound to continue the payment when the condition is diſſolved on your part: that the money devoted by them to

the maintenance of perſons, whoſe buſi-neſs it is to adminiſter to them ſacred things according to *their* conſciences, &c." —In other words, a clergyman holds his living from the people upon the expreſs condition that he flatter their paſſions, and make *their* underſtanding the ſtand-ard of *his* inſtructions *.

"It may be eaſily illuſtrated, proceeds our author, by innumerable inſtances, that a man may ſuffer temporal loſſes upon the account of a change in his opinions, and yet not have the ſmalleſt reaſon to complain of perſecution or injuſtice. One example or two will be ſufficient. When the corrupted philoſophy of Ariſ-totle prevailed in the world, a profeſſor of reputation for teaching, and who was, therefore, crouded with ſtudents, and reaped a plentiful income from them;

* It might not be unedifying to follow Mr. Dunlop through every part of this argument of his upon ſub-ſcription, and I have the greateſt inclination to do it. But I confine myſelf here to his principle concerning the dependance of the clergy upon the people, and that they hold their livings upon the condition of preaching only what is agreeable to their audience.

would

would evidently be expoſed to a very great loſs, by changing his ſchemes, and forming new ones, either ſuch as thoſe of Des Cartes or Sir Iſaac Newton, in their ſtead, unleſs he had the influence to perſuade others alſo to make the ſame alteration in their ſentiments; becauſe ſo long as the world continued in their former humour, the number of his ſcholars muſt conſtantly decay: and yet he could not with the ſmalleſt plauſibility alledge, that thoſe ſcholars who deſerted his leſſons, that they might beſtow their time and their money upon other maſters, had done him any injury; ſince it was abſolutely in their power to chooſe what philoſophy they would have taught them, and what perſons ſhould enjoy the emoluments ariſing therefrom."

Here is a confeſſion from Mr. Dunlop himſelf of what I have aſſerted, that this argument of his has no connection with *truth*;—that it is as ſtrong upon ſuppoſition that it wants this circumſtance as that it poſſeſſes it. The philoſophy of Newton is now generally ſuppoſed true, and

that

that of Ariſtotle falſe. Yet the argument was as ſtrong, by Mr. Dunlop's own confeſſion, in the mouths of Ariſtotle's diſciples, as it is now in the mouths of the orthodox. The concluſion is direct. Be they right or wrong, ſubſcriptions muſt be continued. The authors of theſe impoſitions, in defence of their meaſure, alledged that they meant to guard the *truth*; and, whatever we may think of their underſtandings, we are ſtill diſpoſed to give them credit for their intentions. But what are we to think of their preſent defenders, who when forced to relinquiſh that firſt ground, ſtill maintain the conflict, and reſolutely declare that their opinions ſhall be ſupported even upon the ſuppoſition that they are falſe? Or is there no difference between the two * caſes,

* There is alſo another difference by no means immaterial, if this were the place to inſiſt upon it. The prevalence of the two philoſophies depended merely upon *conviction*. Subſcription is eſtabliſhed by *law*, and, conſequently, may ſtand its ground when it is deſerted by conviction, and when the ſociety itſelf ſhall in vain endeavour to recall it. Nay,

caſes, and ſhall we think that argument concluſive which admits of infamous compariſons, and would degrade the profeſſion of a clergyman to the level of a buffoon or a dancing maſter?

When Jeſus Chriſt inſtituted a ſet of public teachers in his church, he certainly proceeded upon this principle, that the multitude, in all ages, have need of helps, and require to be enlightened, and directed by thoſe who have more ability than themſelves. Accordingly, in every period of chriſtianity, the miniſters of religion have been endowed, their very office is eſtabliſhed upon the ſuppoſition that they are endowed with talents which render them ſuperior to the people. For this purpoſe, immediate inſpiration was at firſt neceſſary; and, when that ceaſed, the want of it was, in ſome meaſure, ſupplied by the inſtitution of public ſeminaries, and a la-

Nay, if we come to particulars, I believe it will not be difficult to imagine, perhaps to produce, inſtances of a clergyman's being depoſed, in conſequence of law, contrary to the deſires and ſentiments of his whole pariſh. Was not the whole of this actually the caſe at the reformation?

borious

barious exerciſe of academical education. This is one diſtinguiſhed part in the external polity of our religion; and has conduced, perhaps more than any other circumſtance, to diffuſe its advantages among mankind. A ſet of men thus qualified, devoted to the ſtudy of religion, and ſet apart for the purpoſe of communicating their ſentiments to the multitude, muſt, when actuated by the ſole ſpirit of their own inſtitution, produce the beſt effects in ſociety. So far, therefore, from holding their temporalities upon the condition of teaching thoſe doctrines which are agreeable to the people; if theſe have any connection with their office at all, the condition upon which they hold them muſt be, that they faithfully inſtruct the people according to their own beſt information, and, without coveting their applauſe or dreading their cenſure, point out their errors, as well as confirm their piety.

In treating this argument, the advocates for orthodoxy ought to have ſeen, and if their zeal had not prevailed over

their

their better principles they undoubtedly would have ſeen, that the end of this inſtitution can only be defeated by two cauſes. It may be defeated by a diſhonourable paſſion for popularity, which leads the clergy themſelves to proſtitute their talents for the ſake of vulgar applauſe; and it may be defeated by reſtricting them, under the penalty of temporal puniſhments, to a particular ſet of opinions. Fatal to religion, and in evident oppoſition to the intention of a chriſtian miniſtry, as theſe cauſes are; the orthodox, in theory and practice, have ever been profeſſed advocates for both.

I am not an enemy to religious eſtabliſhments. They are good or evil, like moſt other well-intended inſtitutions, according to the principles on which they are conſtructed. The pernicious conſequences with which in every age they have been hitherto attended, have not proceeded from any thing neceſſarily bad in their own nature, but from the all-providing policy of their founders; who, having

having an unſteady proſpect of their proper utility, and not being able to determine with preciſion the true line where their good effects ceaſed and their bad began, have, in every inſtance, paſſed the limit, and wounded religion while they intended to protect it. Our own eſtabliſhment may be adduced as an inſtance. By ſecuring their emoluments, and placing the power of admiſſion to the office in their own body; it has rendered the clergy independent of thoſe whom they are deſigned to inſtruct, and, conſequently, removed their ſtrongeſt temptations to popularity. So far the effects of it are ſalutary. The clergy, by this wiſe proviſion, may act as miniſters of Chriſt, not creatures of the people. But, in their next ſtep, our eſtabliſhers have deſtroyed their own work, and rendered every end of the inſtitution abortive. By requiring ſubſcription from the clergy to a particular ſet of articles, they have bound them down to the opinions of the multitude as effectually as if they were hired during pleaſure, and held their office on condi-

tion

tion of preaching nothing but what was agreeable to their audience.

I believe, however, though ſubſcription has this effect, and is now defended upon this principle; it was not originally inſtituted with this view. The founders of our eſtabliſhment themſelves ſaw the abſurdity of making the people judges of their teachers. They have, in fact, placed that power in their own body. The clergy alone can admit a candidate into the office of the miniſtry, and they alone can depoſe him. This is an acknowledgment in point that they are the only competent judges of their own members. Even the temporal emoluments of the church, that every ſpecies of ſo unnatural a dependance might be deſtroyed, have been taken from the people. In theſe obvious points, the conſequences of this principle were evidently diſcerned; and it has, in fact, been rejected as preposterous. Or perhaps the oppoſite regulations were ſo proper that nature led mankind to adopt them without reaſoning. Whatever might have been the fact,

we

we are not to imagine that, after making theſe arrangements, the church would enact any inſtitution with a view to render them abortive, and defeat their own policy. If they have inſtituted ſubſcription, they have done it from a principle of zeal for the perpetuity of opinions which they accounted ſacred *; without foreſeeing the conſequences,—that it would embroil their other inſtitutions, and lead back the clergy to that popular dependance againſt which they had taken ſuch precautions. In proceſs of time, when it was obſerved to have this effect, and urged as an objection; the advocates for orthodoxy were under a neceſſity either of profiting by experience, and aboliſhing the practice, or of adopting the objection, and turning it into an argument in their own favour. Thus, in order to ſave ſubſcription, they have given up every advantage of regular eſtabliſhments, and adopted reaſonings, and avowed principles

* That is, for the perpetuity of their own opinions. There is a fatal ſelf-deluſion in every caſe of this nature.

which Mahometans would be aſhamed of.—I have made theſe obſervations to ſhew the fallacy of Mr. Dunlop's argument. It is the duty of the clergy; it is implied in the original obligations of their office, and can be ſet aſide by no human regulations, to enlighten the people,—to conduct them to truth, as well as to virtue. The contrary principle, however ingeniouſly it may be explained, is undoubtedly abſurd; and, if there are any of our religious conſtitutions which require to be ſupported by ſuch a principle, we can only ſay that this very circumſtance is a preſumption againſt them, and an additional argument * for reformation.

Ic

* Mr. Dunlop makes the condition of a clergyman's enjoying his benefice to be his preaching what is agreeable to the people. It is ſtrange that he never thought of making *honeſty* the condition. It is certainly a more equitable one, and more agreeable to the ſpirit of chriſtianity. But then a clergyman may be honeſt, and yet ceaſe to be a chriſtian. Shall a chriſtian ſociety hire him to preach againſt chriſtianity?—I affirm that this is impoſſible. Upon ſuppoſition that the chriſtian religion is *true*, it is impoſ-

It is in vain, then, to argue againſt a reformation from the diſpoſitions of the people. A clergyman muſt not ſhrink from his duty becauſe it may be attended with danger. But is the danger ſo great as theſe managers would perſuade us? I believe it would not be difficult to ſhew that a reformation is practicable even upon their own principles.

If, indeed, a rebellion were to be the conſequence of attempting a meaſure of this nature,—and the ſcruples of ſome people are as clamorous as if this were actually the event dreaded; if the lives or properties of the clergy themſelves were threatened; or if there were even an apprehenſion that, in ſuch an event, the people would deſert the altars, and our orators become mere voces clamantium in deſerto, there might be ſome pretence

ſible that any clergyman can be honeſt and ceaſe to be a chriſtian. He may, indeed, ceaſe to be orthodox. This is what they fear, and, therefore, they juſtly think honeſty an inſufficient ſecurity.—What a ſuſpicious religion muſt that be, that cannot repoſe itſelf upon the honeſty of mankind?

for caution. Theſe would, indeed, be very grievous caſes, and might ſtagger a man of ſome firmneſs. But every body who knows the preſent ſtate of religion in this kingdom is ſenſible that no ſuch mighty revolutions are to be apprehended. The bare mention of ſuch events, proceeding from ſuch a cauſe, is ſufficient to expoſe the ſuppoſition.

Let us attend one moment to the fact as it ſtands at preſent, and has ſtood now for ſome time. The people of this kingdom are divided, upon the point of religion, into two great factions;—the Eſtabliſhed Church, and the Diſſenters. The latter faction is made up of all thoſe ſpirits whoſe combuſtible materials render them troubleſome in the ſociety of ſober people, and it is recruited and nouriſhed by a perpetual influx of the ſame fiery matter. The former faction conſiſts of the reſt of the kingdom, purged and left ſober by the ſeparation of this matter; which takes wing, and flies off, by this channel, as faſt as it is produced. This is one great advantage which the eſtabliſhed

church, and which the civil ſociety, derive from toleration. If theſe ſublimated ſpirits had no channel of egreſs, but were pent up by law within the mounds of eſtabliſhment, they would act with violence on every thing near them, and produce ſuch conſtant exploſions as might ſhake church and ſtate, and light the whole ſociety into a flame. The only conſequence, therefore, of a reformation, ſuppoſing it to be diſagreeable to the people, would be an increaſed efflux of theſe dangerous ſpirits;—whoſe materials, being already prepared, are ready to kindle at any incident, and who would, conſequently, ſeparate themſelves from the reſt of us, and leave the whole body in a ſounder ſtate than it was before. But even this ſeparation, ſuppoſing, what is abſurd enough, that it would be a diſadvantage, would not be conſiderable on this occaſion. The principle on which our Diſſenters ſeparated, and ſtill ſtand diſtinct from the Eſtabliſhment, is this.—They alledge that the eſtabliſhed clergy have departed from our ſtandards, and

preach

preach doctrines different from thoſe ſettled by their own original conſtitutions. The orthodox part of our clergy refuſe this, and appeal for the truth of what they affirm to our public engagements. The Diſſenters, however, inſiſt upon the fact; and have gained this additional advantage from the denial of it, that they reproach our practice as being contrary to our profeſſed principles, and charge us with diſingenuity in entering into engagements which we mean not to obſerve, and which, accordingly, we every day violate without ceremony. The conſequence, therefore, of aboliſhing theſe engagements would not, in reality, be any ſenſible increaſe to their faction. Every body who is diſatisfied with our departure from the original foundations joins them at any rate, and every body may judge from his miniſter's own mouth whether ſuch a departure has been made or not. But the conſequence would be the vindicating ourſelves from a very grievous accuſation, and depriving the Diſſenters, in their factional capacity, of an argument which

gains them more proſelytes, and which, ſuppoſing it true, is more reproachful to the church, than any other argument they can adduce. They could not gain any conſiderable increaſe of proſelytes on this occaſion. There would be no additional reaſon given, but the contrary. The Seceſſion ſtands upon the ſuppoſition that, whatever we may profeſs, our doctrines are actually different from the original doctrines of this church. This they firmly believe. This every one of our own members can already judge of. The refuſal of this, in the eyes of the Diſſenters, is only an aggravation of our guilt, and an additional reaſon for ſeceſſion. Again, with regard to the Eſtabliſhment itſelf, the ſame obſervations are good. Our own clergy are divided into two factions;—the orthodox, and thoſe whom, for the ſake of diſtinction, we may call the moral clergy. The difference between theſe is twofold.—They differ with regard to the doctrines of chriſtianity, and with regard to the regulations of the church concerning theſe doctrines. The Ortho-

dox profeſs thoſe doctrines, or nearly thoſe doctrines, for which the Diſſenters contend; and which having, without doubt, been the original doctrines of this church, beſtow all the advantage upon this part of their cauſe which it can derive from antiquity. The ſecond ſubject of difference regards the regulations of the church concerning theſe doctrines, and is more problematical. The orthodox affirm that the church has eſtabliſhed theſe doctrines as the *only* and *perpetual* doctrines of this church; that, in conſequence of this, ſhe requires a particular ſubſcription, from every clergyman, to *every one* of theſe doctrines; and likewiſe an engagement, under the penalty of expulſion, never, while he continues a miniſter of this church, to depart from *any* of them. Upon this ground they join the Diſſenters, and reproach their moral brethren with diſingenuity, and breach of engagement. Their antagoniſts, again, contend that the ſubſcription is only *general*, and that the engagement of adherence reſpects a different object. This argument has al-

ready been diſcuſſed. What I would obſerve here is—Suppoſing the deſired reformation to take place, it would produce no actual difference upon the religious opinions of the parties. The orthodox would not be prohibited, any more than they are at preſent, from preaching what doctrines they judged proper. The moral clergy too would preach juſt as they do at this hour. Perſuaſion would be the only means which could be employed to make proſelytes; and ſome would join the one claſs of teachers, ſome the other, exactly as they did formerly. The only effect ſuch a reform could produce would be, the removing from one part of the clergy every pretence of reproaching their brethren, and putting it out of the power of all to harraſs one another with proſecutions. No commotion, no additional ſeceſſion could follow. The clergy would preach, the people would hear, according as they felt themſelves diſpoſed, juſt as they do at preſent: only with this advantage to the cauſe of truth and virtue, that, the foundation of animoſity among

the clergy themſelves being removed, the wrathful paſſions would ſubſide, they would ceaſe to contend, they would exhibit to the nation more of the meek ſpirit which ſhould actuate their order; they would, conſequently, draw more reſpect from all ranks, and the whole body acquire additional * dignity. Theſe

* The ingenious gentleman to whom I have already acknowledged myſelf obliged for a number of very ſenſible annotations upon this tract, wiſhes that I had entered into a farther detail upon this point, and deſcribed the two leading parties in this church a little more minutely: as his ideas and mine upon this ſubject are perfectly conſonant, I think I cannot expreſs myſelf better than in his own words.

"The diſtinction of theſe parties, ſays he, is well underſtood in this country by their appearances both in church-courts and in the pulpit. The firſt rigidly adhere in their ſermons, writings, and converſation to the ſyſtem of doctrines embraced by their forefathers, contained in the Weſtminſter confeſſion, and eſtabliſhed (as they think) by act of parliament; and are ſtartled at the leaſt deviation from it, let it bear never ſo hard upon the more ſcrupulous conſciences of their brethren. Yet in matters of mere order and church-government, particularly in the ſettlement of pariſhes according to law and preſentations,

Theſe apprehended difficulties are ſtill farther diminiſhed when we come to par-

tations, the generality of the orthodox or high party are very tender of their own conſciences and thoſe of the people. Here they declaim againſt eccleſiaſtical tyranny: they aſſert the right of private judgment in its utmoſt extent, ſo far as to vindicate every man in following his own prejudices, humour, and caprice: Here they ſet up the authority of conſcience in oppoſition to the authority both of the parliament and the church. On the other hand, the moderate party, as they affect to call themſelves, have no ſcruple to give a ready obedience to civil and eccleſiaſtical authority, and to require the ſame obedience from others in matters of mere order and church-government; yet they conſider themſelves as by no means bound to pay the ſame implicit obedience to it in matters of faith. Here they think they have an equal right to judge for themſelves as their forefathers had: that they lie under original obligations to be faithful to Chriſt and his truth which no ſubſequent obligations can alter or cancel. They ſcruple not, therefore, to bring the eſtabliſhed ſtandards of the church to the teſt of ſtill more ancient and authentic ſtandards, even the ſcriptures. They affect to diſtinguiſh themſelves by their learning and free enquiry, and by rational, moral, and ſcriptural preaching. The former party are reſpected and revered by the populace, being conſidered by them as the aſſertors of their rights, and the guardians of the ancient faith.

The

particulars, and conſider the different ſchemes of reformation which might be fallen upon. At preſent I ſhall point out five, noticing, as we go along, to what this pretended oppoſition may amount in each.

1*ſt*, The nature of our ſubſcription might be altered. Inſtead of ſubſcribing our aſſent to the confeſſion as a ſyſtem of belief, we might ſubſcribe it as an *help*. What offence could the people take at this? It would ſtill continue to be ſubſcribed, and in the ſenſe which its compoſers themſelves intended; that is, not as infallible, not as an abſolute rule of faith and practice, but, to uſe their own terms, "as an *help* in both." I know not how it is in other parts of the kingdom, but where I live I am poſitive that

The latter are regarded and eſteemed by the people of rank, ſenſe, and learning in this country. And though the firſt have a greater appearance of ſanctity and ſeverity of manners, yet the generality of both are equally regular and blameleſs in their lives." So far my correſpondent, and I think he has done the ſubject great juſtice.

the

the people would even *blame* their miniſter if they thought he ſubſcribed in any other ſenſe. Yet this ſimple, harmleſs ſtep taken would remove the greateſt part of the grievance.

2*d*, They might be ſubſcribed as articles of peace. I mean every clergyman might ſubſcribe them not as *true*, but as doctrines which, for the ſake of peace, he engaged not to contradict *. If the Biſhop of Glouceſter has really perſuaded the

* For this ſtep, beſides its reaſonableneſs and practicability conſidered in themſelves, we have the authority of our mother church, the proteſtant church of Geneva. She has actually taken this ſtep ſome time ago. Shall we not follow the example of our mother? Would to God that John Knox were alive at this moment!

In him I ſhould find a vigorous, and undaunted ſupporter. *He* would ſave me the trouble of anſwering the anſwers which are to be written to this tract. O that there were a little of his ſpirit among us at this day!

I am perſuaded that he would be the firſt man to attempt the reformation of his own regulations. Perhaps, indeed, he would not *now* find it practicable. Church-governors would, at leaſt, tell him ſo; but ſure I am he would attempt it.

He

the government that it has a right to intermeddle in religious affairs, and that it is for its intereſt to do ſo, this certainly would fully anſwer *that* intention. There could be no obſtacles to this innovation from that quarter. I doubt, however, or rather I have no doubt about it, how far any miniſter could, in conſcience, ſubſcribe in this ſenſe. He is certainly

He had too much greatneſs of mind not to acknowledge an error, and too much honeſty not to endeavour to amend it. Were *he* alive, and it was an unſpeakable loſs to the church of Scotland, which he modelled, that ever he died—I ſay, were John Knox alive at this day, I am perſuaded he would concur in this great work, even though he were one of the miniſters of Edinburgh.

True, he would probably meet with oppoſition. I make not the leaſt doubt but there are diſputants in this kingdom at preſent who would contradict him to his face, and defend his *own* inſtitutions againſt *himſelf*.

Nay I am inclined to believe that, long before this time, they would have ſerved him with a libel of hereſy before the Synod of Glaſgow and Ayr, and charged him with diſſimulation and perjury in the Scots Magazine, for having had the *preſumption* to retract ſome of his *own* opinions, and acknowledge himſelf in the wrong.

engaged, by the very nature of his office, to preach what *he* thinks to be *truth*. This would be a counter-engagement. It would be an engagement to conceal the truth in certain circumſtances. An engagement to which, I am afraid, the apoſtle Paul never would have ſubmitted, who reckoned it his duty to declare the *whole* counſel of God. At the ſame time, it would be better to put the affair *actually* upon this footing, than to pretend that it is upon this footing, while in fact, it is *not* upon this footing. As to the people,—the conſequences of this ſtep would certainly be moſt agreeable to *them*. They would then never hear their favourite opinions contradicted. They would know that their paſtor engaged for no more, and they would expect no more. Great part of the preſent odium againſt a miniſter of the goſpel who inculcates morality ariſes from this circumſtance, that he is thought to have broke an engagement. They are not ſo abſurd as to clamour againſt him for preaching his real ſentiments, but for preaching them in the face of a promiſe to the contrary. Nothing

thing has a greater tendency to diminiſh the moral dignity of a clergyman in the eyes of his people than an opinion of this nature. There is ſomething little in it. At the ſame time the people, as well as the church, ought to be undeceived in this point. They ought to be told that a clergyman is as free, notwithſtanding ſubſcription, to change his opinions, upon conviction, as any other man; and, when he receives better information, that it is alſo his duty to communicate it to his people.

3dly, A review might be made of the articles of ſubſcription themſelves, and a conſequent concert entered into betwixt the two religious parties to drop thoſe articles, from the liſt to be ſubſcribed, which are the ſubject of conteſt; leaving every miniſter at liberty to preach upon them or not according as his conſcience may direct him. In ſhort, let only thoſe articles be propoſed for ſubſcription, in the truth of which both parties are agreed. This ſtep too would be preciſely agreeable to the ſpirit of the firſt compilers of confeſſions, and to the ſpirit of

our

our compilers in particular. The Weſtminſter divines, as is well known, propoſed their articles of faith in the moſt mitigated ſenſe, and expreſſed them in the moſt mitigated terms, with this very intention, that a greater number of all denominations might be able to accede to them. They, in fact, propoſed only thoſe articles, and in that ſenſe of them, in which the greater part were agreed; leaving out all thoſe high ſenſes which would have been the unavoidable ſubject of diviſion. Let us follow their wiſe example. I cannot think that the orthodox party would refuſe to concur in this motion. The moderate part of them certainly would not. It would alſo pleaſe thoſe of the other party who are diſatisfied with our preſent confeſſion, and who yet cannot think of giving up confeſſions altogether; thoſe, in ſhort, who proceed upon this principle, that *any* confeſſion is better than *none*. In the laſt place, it would be a worthy precedent, and a great example ſet by our church for their ſucceſſors in future ages, and for other churches,

churches, to imitate. It proceeds upon this moſt reaſonable principle, that, if confeſſions are *neceſſary*, every ſet of clergymen have an undoubted right, at leaſt, to make their own confeſſion. What renders this principle the more reaſonable is, the ſucceſſive variation of knowledge, and the proteſtant datum of human *fallibility*. We have, additional to all theſe motives, an actual precedent for it in our own church. It is a fact that we have already altered our confeſſion. This cannot be denied. Why not do it a ſecond time? Or a third, or a fourth time? Or as often as it ſhall become neceſſary? I do not ſee that the oppoſition to ſo well-ſupported a motion could be very great in this kingdom. Would to God the practice were once introduced into every proteſtant church in Chriſtendom! we never can be ſaid to be reformed from popery until this take place.

4*th*, What if the practice of ſubſcription to human creeds were aboliſhed altogether? This would be the moſt perfect ſcheme of reformation. Our preſent

confeſſion never, in fact, was ſubſcribed till after the revolution. Why not bring the church back to that foundation? Let it be ſufficient to ſubſcribe the ſcriptures. What could the people ſay to this? Would they give the Confeſſion of Faith the preference to the ſcriptures? I dare to ſay, if the affair were properly repreſented to them, there are none of them ſo ignorant as to balance, for any conſiderable time, between the two books.

5*th*, The foregoing ſchemes would require the concurrence of the legiſlature, and may, therefore, be thought by ſome to be ſtill attended with ſome degree of labour. There is one reform, however, of an eaſier nature. It depends entirely upon the clergy themſelves. It requires no foreign aſſiſtance. It is in the church's own power, and may be carried into effect by her in her own capacity. It could excite no murmuring. It is, that we would only take the trouble to explain, and declare a point in our own conſtitution. It has been proved, I think beyond the poſſibility of a diſpute, that the Formula of

1711 is illegal; that even the Formula of 1694 has exceeded the act of parliament; and that the clauſe of adherence, in both Formulas, implies no engagement to leave the church upon a change of ſentiment. The conſequence from theſe facts is, that the public engagements of this church conſiſt merely in a *general* approbation of our confeſſion, and a promiſe of honeſty. Neither church nor ſtate require more, and no candidate can legally be obliged to engage for more. Let this, then, once for all, and to prevent every poſſibility of future miſtake, be declared to be the ſenſe of the church upon this point. Let the Formula of 1711 be formally aboliſhed as illegal; let that of 1694 be corrected and adjuſted to the act of parliament; and let the clauſe of adherence be defined.—I am ſenſible the orthodox will conteſt the facts on which this reform proceeds; and, the longer it remains unexamined, their plea will become the more plauſible. Let it, therefore, without more delay, be enquired into. It is the indiſpenſable duty

of the church to do this. She owes this to truth, to her own reputation, and to the remonſtrances of her members. If ſhe has exceeded the powers veſted in her by parliament, it is incumbent on her, as an eſtabliſhment, to repair her miſtake, and recognize the laws of her country. If ſhe has paſſed her own conſtitutions, it is a piece of juſtice which ſhe owes * herſelf. I can ſee no poſſible good end it can ſerve to ſuffer this point to remain longer ambiguous. The deciſion of it would anſwer a noble one. If, contrary to my preſent conviction, the iſſue of this enquiry ſhould prove favourable to the

* This is the moſt feaſible ſcheme of reformation. It is, indeed, exceedingly practicable; and, if it be not attempted, I deſpair of ever ſeeing our church move in the buſineſs. It ſeems to be the only chance we have left; and if we neglect to improve it we may give up every future hope of liberty. There is one way, however, by which the church may be *forced* upon this enquiry. Should ſome ſpirited candidate for probation refuſe, upon the foundation of *law*, to ſubſcribe our preſent Formula, our aſſembly would be obliged, in courſe of buſineſs, to take it formally into conſideration, and to determine its legality.

orthodox hypotheſis, we are, at leaſt, in no worſe condition than formerly. At this moment we are proceeded againſt as if that hypotheſis were true, as if the law were expreſs, and every circumſtance found to be in *their* favour. Beſides, the point would then be determined, and the oppreſſion under which we labour be manifeſt. It would then be the duty of the church to apply the remedy, and amend her own conſtitution. In that caſe, let the proper powers be ſeriouſly called upon. If our ſubſcription is not *general,* let it be made ſo; and let the clauſe of adherence be thrown out as utterly abſurd. This is the only ſubſcription, if we muſt have a ſubſcription, which is agreeable to the ſpirit of chriſtianity, and can be reconciled to proteſtant principles. The people could not, they would not oppoſe this. They are not ſo unreaſonable. There are many of them that do not believe every article of the confeſſion themſelves, and more of them that do not underſtand it. There could be no ſerious oppoſition from this quarter.

They know that, in fact, this is the ſenſe of many of their teachers already; and a declaration, in words, to this purpoſe would not ſurpriſe them. On the contrary, I am convinced that, in ſuch an event, they would be diſpoſed to give the clergy additional credit for their honeſty.

In eſtimating the force of the ſuppoſed oppoſition, there is one circumſtance which we ought not to loſe ſight of. It is, that this is a tranſaction among the clergy themſelves. Perhaps it would not be difficult to convince the people that it is wholly out of *their* province; that clergymen are the beſt judges of their own regulations; and that chriſtian liberty is not thereby in the leaſt encroached on. Admitting there might be Diſſenters: What then? Where would be the harm of this? Every chriſtian poſſeſſes the right of private judgment, and may follow that paſtor who is moſt agreeable to him. Why not exerciſe his right? It is what he does already.

For

For the ſake of thoſe who might be afraid of the conſequences of any of theſe regulations to the church of Scotland as "a diſtinct church," — we might add a ſolemn renunciation of popery, an engagement to maintain the preſent form of church government as it is eſtabliſhed in this kingdom, and an acknowledgment of her authority as a ſociety. The happy conſequences of this reform might be painted, without exaggeration, in the moſt glowing colours. I confine myſelf here to its practicability.

That a reformation is practicable, ſetting reaſons of *peace* aſide, ſo far as it regards the *church*, is evident likewiſe from this circumſtance, that a *majority* of the clergy in Scotland are, at this day, convinced of its propriety. Poſſibly I may be miſtaken in my calculation; but, if this be the caſe, what becomes of the alledged impracticability? To what ſources is it to be traced *?

This

* —To an indifference for religion; to a calloufneſs, the mark of a diſſipated age, which hinders men from feeling the impropriety of their own con-

This circumſtance, indeed, with reſpect to the point of practicability, ought to be the barometer of every church. If it holds here, it is a moſt certain mark that ours is ripe for a revolution. And there is no method of determining it but to let the parties try their ſtrength.

Thus it appears that, of theſe five ſchemes, none of them would, in all probability, meet with much oppoſition; all of them are practicable; any one of them executed would ſet us free from our preſent diſagreeable ſituation, and be attended with infinite advantages. While men proceed upon general reaſonings, and expatiate in general aſſertions, the field of debate is endleſs. Reduce them to particulars, and all their argumentations and impracticabilities appear to be nothing more than a number of *long*

duct; to a narrow mind, the wary concomitant of a phlegmatic prudence, which extinguiſhes the generous fervour of ſentiment, which bounds the views within the circle of perſons and parties, and will for ever prevent us from engaging in any ſcheme which has no object but the common advantage.

words,

words, invented to elude reaſoning, and colour over the indolence of churchmen. Neceſſity, utility, duty, practicability, urge with repeated inſtances. How long ſhall they urge in vain?

It is time to come to a concluſion. One cannot take leave of ſo intereſting a ſubject without being in ſome concern for the event. The preſent ſituation of our religious affairs is very aſtoniſhing. Upon a review, it appears ſo extremely extraordinary, that it is to be preſumed it cannot continue long. Matters ſeem tending to ſome great criſis. The repreſentation which I have attempted to give of the preſent ſtate of our religious eſtabliſhment is intended, not ſo much to ſilence the oppoſite party; I verily believe this is impoſſible; as, by ſtating the real deplorable ſituation of affairs, to ſtimulate both parties, even upon their own principles, to apply a remedy. Complaints are made of grievances on both ſides, and loud ones. The honeſt of all denominations would rejoice to ſee them removed. Suffer me, therefore, to addreſs

dreſs you both with this view. And, firſt, let me apply myſelf to the orthodox party.—I give *you* the precedence, gentlemen! on account of your antiquity. High anceſtry is allowed by the vulgar,—and you ſet no ſmall value on *their* opinion,—to be a very powerful foundation of regard; eſpecially—but I would not inſinuate that this is *your* caſe—where people have no other merit to recommend them. I know that it has not been diſagreeable to you to ſee me, through the whole of this performance, ſtand ſo much upon ceremony with you. You are not averſe to diſtinctions, eſpecially when you chance to be compared with the other party; and, when I can do it, as here, without offending againſt truth, you ſhall be indulged. Come, then, and let us reaſon the point together. You complain, ye venerable deſcendants of Calvin! that many of the opinions of John Knox are no more regarded in theſe days than if they were not his; and that the preſent generation are as eager to think for themſelves as if the Aſſembly of Divines at

Weſt-

Weſtminſter had not thought before them. You are particularly concerned for the young Students of Divinity, who, you ſay, are made Heretics by * *reading*; and you aſk, with tears in your eyes, if people go on to read and to think in this manner, what will become of the ancient Church of Scotland? And truly, my Reverend Fathers! it muſt be confeſſed ſhe will be in ſome danger. But what gives you greateſt pain is the abuſes which the doctrine of *faith* hath introduced into the church. Who could have thought that any evil could have ariſen to you from *that* quarter? Not ſatisfied with the ſpiritual rewards annexed to this beloved word,—for it would not be orthodox to call it a *virtue*, and if I called it a *grace* you would think I ſneered, I therefore call it a *word*,—for its farther encouragement, and that you might not be wanting on *your* parts, you took the liberty to add to theſe ſpiritual benefits ſome rewards of a temporal nature. With this view,—I mean to encourage *faith*—you

* See the Scots Magazine for January 1768.

made

made an act that whoever would believe the *Confeſſion*, and declare ſo publickly without being aſhamed of it, ſhould be entitled to the higheſt emoluments of the church,—and not otherwiſe. But *ecce opus manuum veſtrarum!* For this act was no ſooner made than ſuch a multitude of *believers* ruſhed in, that even the moſt zealous partizans of faith took umbrage, and began to wiſh ſome of them out again. You began to think there were too many daily added to the church, and that many of *theſe had* even too much faith. So much were matters altered. In ſhort, you ſuſpected them, and you were at no pains to conceal your ſuſpicions of diſſimulation. This you were the readier to do when you reflected that *faith*, and in this caſe fully as much as in any other, was the gift of God, and had no connection with human probability. But what is moſt grievous in your eyes, ſome, who, you had reaſon to think, really believed theſe doctrines at the time they ſaid ſo, among others Mr. Ferguſſon, have been known, as they advanced

in

in years, and, as ſome alledge, in knowledge, to become gradually of a contrary opinion, and at laſt to degenerate into profeſſed advocates againſt them. Theſe are the men whoſe opinions, you complain, no words can bind; who are perpetually reading and thinking, and truſting to their own underſtandings; who, conſequently, in courſe of time, come to ſee errors even in the Confeſſion of Faith; who, in fine, are raſh enough to publiſh their diſcoveries to the world, and ſo, at laſt, completely perjure themſelves. From all theſe circumſtances you raiſe a moſt grievous lamentation. And deſervedly, for it muſt be confeſſed there is a great deal of truth in them. But, admitting all your complaints to be ever ſo well-founded, what are you to do? What do you reckon your duty in ſo critical an emergency? You profeſs yourſelves to be men of ſincerity, and intereſted in the cauſe of righteouſneſs. At the ſame time, you muſt be ſenſible that, while affairs remain in the preſent ſituation,

ſituation, theſe complaints of yours muſt continue, probably grow worſe. What, then, is to be done? There is but one remedy. Remove the original cauſe of them. Take away, as far as lies in your power, all temptations to inſincerity. This will be doing virtue a real ſervice. Aboliſh your Formula, correct your confeſſion, and put your ſubſcription on a different footing. You may ſafely truſt the cauſe of orthodoxy with itſelf, without propping it by ſo many external ſupporters. As Gamaliel ſaid, in what you will think a ſimilar caſe, If it be the cauſe of the Lord and of truth, it will ſtand; if it be not, why ſhould it not go to deſtruction?

Even upon ſuppoſition that your ſide of the queſtion is the right one, ſtill I would urge you to reformation. The effects of your policy have, you ſee, in the event, proved contrary to all your expectations. Your confeſſions, your Formulas, and your boaſted eſtabliſhments have deceived you. Inſtead of

producing

producing righteouſneſs and peace, they have produced, according to your own account, contentions, diſſimulations, and perjuries. Conformity of opinion has been ſo far from being promoted, that the church is divided into as many ſects at this day, ſome will think into more, as the moſt ſanguine advocates for confeſſions could have dreaded had every man, without reſtraint, been allowed to think for himſelf ſince the foundation of our religious conſtitution. Nor has orthodoxy, which was the leaſt you could have propoſed, been able to preſerve itſelf pure even in the Eſtabliſhment itſelf. Some, you ſay, ſteal into the church by diſſembling their ſentiments at the very entrance; others obtain new light, and change their opinions afterwards; the doctrines of the church are no longer the doctrines of her members; her internal ſyſtem is almoſt entirely altered; orthodoxy declines apace, and hereſy gains ground, and becomes every day more formidable. To what purpoſe, then, are

all

all your conſtitutions? Name me one ſingle good effect which they have ever produced. If their intention was to promote virtue, the event hath been the very contrary. If you meant to encourage uniformity, they have failed here too. If you thought they would ſecure orthodoxy, how egregiouſly have you been miſtaken? But their correction, perhaps I might ſay their final abolition, will injure none of all theſe. Upon your own principles, therefore, you ought immediately to ſet about reforming. I reaſon here upon the ſuppoſition that the doctrines which theſe conſtitutions are intended to guard are agreeable to the ſcriptures. But what if they are not, and you have all this time, againſt the truths of God, been ſupporting the cauſe of Belial?

For you of the other party,—I need not ſpend much time in urging a reformation upon *you*. You are already convinced of its propriety. But you want reſolution

reſolution. What I more regret, you want unity. Were you to combine, and be firm to your own ſentiments; where is the force that could oppoſe you? But you are divided, you are irreſolute. In the mean time, your enemies loudly inſult over you, and the ſacred cauſe of truth, for which you ought to ſuffer every extremity, lies bleeding from the wounds of bigotry. Yet one time or other the noble ſtand will be made. Some generous defenders will ſtep forth, and wipe off the ignominious impreſſion. And what time, ye reverend leaders of the church! can be more proper than the preſent? A ſpirit is up in theſe kingdoms which, I truſt, will not be laid but in the ruins of ſuperſtition and hypocriſy. In the mean time, I would urge you with but one topic, and then let the ſtorm take its courſe. But this topic is perſonal. Your characters, your characters, —all that is dear to virtuous men,— your honeſty and good faith, have been attacked in the moſt atrocious manner.

Will you ſit tamely down with this, and hear yourſelves publickly branded with the names of perjured men, and ſcandalous diſſemblers? Chriſtian charity requires not ſuch a ſacrifice. They have provoked the battle, and let it roll upon them. Daſh their weapons of *offence* to the ground; and, by one reſolute ſtep, put it out of their power for ever to renew the accuſation. You ſay you are convinced of your own integrity. And do you reſt ſatisfied with that? No, that is not ſufficient. You are men of public characters, and ought to be above ſuſpicion.

But then the peace of the country—Still the peace of the country.—Ye cold politicians! it cannot be more diſturbed than it is already. This unhappy country is divided into as many religious ſects as it will hold. Your opinions are known in *fact*; why will you not avow them in *name*? The people have already ſeparated from you on this very account, and the boldeſt ſtep you can *now* take will furniſh them

them with no additional reaſons. But I wrong ſo glorious a cauſe in reaſoning upon it after this manner. When *truth* is the ſubject in debate, ſhall we meanly deſcend to argue upon foundations of *policy*? Go, then, ye diſintereſted *patriots!* continue to conſult the welfare of your *country*, at the expence of your own reputations.

APPENDIX.

I.

AS many people may be desirous of seeing the Letter which was the immediate occasion of this dispute; as it is, besides, a sort of curiosity in itself, and may throw light upon the present state of religion in this country; I shall here insert it entire.

Copy of a Letter from the Reverend Mr. Alexander Fergusson, Minister at Kilwinning, to the Reverend Mr. John Adam, Minister at West-Kilbride.

"Dear Brother,

"They that take upon them to censure their brethren's opinions and sermons, do at the same time give them a right to censure theirs. This is your

caſe; ſo you cannot complain of it as ill uſage that I cenſure yours.

I have been told you ſaid, "You ob-"ſerved a ſentiment peculiar to my pa-"riſh; viz. That God had implanted in "our natures the ſeeds of goodneſs and "virtue." This looks as if you thought that ſentiment an error. But my pariſh will glory in it, as a ſentiment that doth honour to God: and I look on the contrary ſentiment as blaſphemy. It is not peculiar to my pariſh: for it is the ſentiment of the moſt learned and pious men in the chriſtian church: with whoſe writings you ſeem unacquainted.

No ſentiment can be more unworthy of God, than to think that he creates intelligent creatures ſinners. He makes us upright, and we make ourſelves ſinners.

I have been alſo told, you ſaid you would pronounce them villains who had ſigned the Confeſſion of Faith, and did not believe every propoſition in it to be truth, and adhere to it as ſuch. This is a cenſure unworthy of a chriſtian, and far more unworthy of a teacher of chriſti-

anity. I fancy you learned it from your leader *; who has in a printed ſermon aſſerted, that we are not to think charitably of ſuch as have opinions or principles different from ours. The apoſtle Paul, who was a better divine than either of you, teaches a quite contrary doctrine, Rom. xiv. It plainly appears from your cenſure, you would deprive us of our natural right of private judgment, and the invaluable privilege of inquiring after truth, and of improving in the knowledge of it. This is to impoſe upon us the doctrine of implicit faith, one of the greateſt errors, and grand ſupports of popery. I aver, that no man ought to ſign his aſſent and adherence to any human compoſure, but in ſo far as it is agreeable to the ſcriptures; which are the only rule of faith and manners; and not the opinions of men, let them be ever ſo learned, pious, and upright. And they that do ſo, act the ſafeſt and the moſt upright part.

* Suppoſed to be Dr. Witherſpoon.

I come now to your ſynodical ſermon on 2 Tim. ii. 15. of which I would have given you my opinion ſooner, but was diſabled from examining it with attention, by my wife's indiſpoſition, and my own frequent ailments. My opinion is as follows: 1. It would have done you more honour, and met with a better ſale, had it been publiſhed at the deſire of the Synod. 2. There are many good things in it, but I wiſh you had ſhown yourſelf on another ſubject; for theſe good things have been treated of in ninety-nine of the hundred ſermons that have been preached before Preſbyteries, Synods, and Aſſemblies, ſince the Revolution in 1688. And many of them have been printed by authority. And you have taken no notice of other things neceſſary to ſhew us as miniſters of religion approved of God. Of theſe I ſhall only mention the knowledge of the languages wherein the ſcriptures were originally written, without which we pin our faith to other men's ſleeves; men who having but a very ſuperficial knowledge of the originals, have formed

doctrines

doctrines upon a ſingle verſe, and ſometimes half a verſe, inconſiſtent with the divine perfections, without conſidering the context: thoſe ſcraps which in ſound mean one thing, but when taken with what goes before and follows after them, have a quite different meaning: which is the true meaning intended by the Spirit of God. 3. You juſtly caution your brethren to be examples to the believers, in charity and ſpirit, p. 7.; but in p. 14, 15, and 16. you act directly contrary to this caution: which too much verifies an obſervation I have heard, "that the clergy preach one thing, "and practiſe another." Inſtead of goſpel truths, you deliver uncharitable cenſures, and unjuſt calumnies, (with an air of aſſurance and omniſcience, as if you knew mens hearts) againſt all in general who differ from you about the meaning of the ſcriptures, in ſome points of divinity. Did you think that preaching things ſo contrary to charity and truth, was the way to ſhew yourſelf approved unto God?

If

If you did, your zeal for ſyſtematic, but unſcriptural doctrines, muſt have blinded your charity and your underſtanding: for you have not been aware, that theſe cenſures and calumnies might, with equal aſſurance, and on much better grounds, be retorted on yourſelf. When you came to ſtudy divinity, (as many others do) you made more uſe of a ſyſtem than of your Bible, and thereby contracted a prejudice in favour of the ſyſtematic doctrines, (and their authors, who aſſumed the name of Orthodox); and therefore you now ſcrew and wreſt the ſcriptures in their favour. Whereas all worthy men, whom you cenſure and calumniate, though they were perhaps taught divinity by a ſyſtem, dropt all their prejudices in favour of their preconceived opinions, impartially enquired after the truth in the ſcriptures, and judged for themſelves. How could it enter into your head to aver, p. 14. that a man who never knew one article of the chriſtian religion, if he had common ſenſe, would find it revealed

vealed in the ſcriptures, "That Chriſt "in his ſufferings ſtood in the room of "ſinners, and bore the puniſhment due "to them?" If ſuch a man read the ſcriptures with attention, he would ſee, that eternal death was the puniſhment due to ſinners, by the ſanction of the law, which allowed of no reprieve or ſubſtitution; for the language of the law is, "the ſoul "that ſinneth ſhall die." He would alſo ſee that Chriſt was the Son of God, perfectly holy, and had never ſinned; ſo could not be ſubjected to eternal death, the puniſhment of ſin.—You ought to have been aſhamed to apply your cenſures and calumnies (in a marginal note) to that great and good man, Mr. Taylor, who underſtood the originals as well, and ſtudied the ſcriptures with as great attention, as any man in the Chriſtian church ſince the apoſtles. I wiſh you were leſs conceited, and not pretend to underſtand them better than he did. You accuſe him of ſometimes making bold alterations of the original text, to ſcrew it into his opinions; and yet you mention but

one

one alteration, and of no bad conſequence. Is that fair dealing? However, Mr. Taylor proves the probability of it by arguments which it is not in your power to confute. Beſides, how are you ſure, that the article ὁ has not been tranſpoſed by an inattentive tranſcriber or ignorant critic? both which have frequently happened to the ſcriptures. Mr. Taylor is ſo honeſt as to acknowledge, that there is no copy to juſtify the alteration, and that it is only his conjecture. His candor ought to have led you to an imitation of it, and reſtrained you from caſting ſuch a groundleſs ſlur on ſuch a worthy man. Beſides, you act an unfair part, in making your readers believe that Mr. Taylor has inſerted the alteration in the text; for it is only placed in his note on Rom. ix. 5.

Though I ſaw your zeal for preconceived opinions derived from ſyſtems, without the leaſt foundation for them in ſcripture or common ſenſe, I was not ſurpriſed; becauſe it is a common effect in all who will not be at the trouble to,

or

or cannot exert their faculties for the diſcovering of truth, and for forming their principles from their Bibles. They eſpouſe a ſyſtem as the eaſieſt and ſhorteſt way to commence divines. Yet I was much ſurpriſed to ſee you fall into a downright contradiction. In p. 16. you juſtly grant that we are to uſe our reaſon in ſearching into the meaning of the ſcriptures; yet you argue againſt and decry reaſon. I wiſh you had told your brethren what you meant by reaſon; whether the intellectual faculty, or the uſe of it, or evident propoſitions naturally revealed; for the word Reaſon is uſed in all theſe ſenſes; and we are to admit nothing that is contrary to common ſenſe and underſtanding: for the ſcriptures can be no rule of faith and manners to us, if the underſtanding God has given us is not to be a rule of judging their meaning.

As to your complaint of the relaxation of diſcipline, I think it came ill from you, as I could ſhew in ſeveral inſtances, wherein I have too much reaſon to think you was very cool. I wiſh you had ſhown

parti-

particularly in what inſtances it is relaxed; for you mention but one, which you call a new kind of diſcipline, "the "converting the cenſure appointed by "the ſcriptures, and the laws of the "church, into a little money for the uſe "of the poor." When you ſaid this, I wiſh many of your brethren may not have thought, that you had forgot your Bible; for it is a piece of diſcipline as old as Daniel; who, chap. iv. 27. recommends it to Nebuchadnezzar; and Zaccheus, Luke xix. where he offers half his goods to the poor; for which our Lord ſaid to him, "This day is ſalva-"tion come to thy houſe." Many ſcriptures authorizing it might be cited; ſee only Prov. xvi. 6. I aver, that though a public rebuke before the congregation prevailed for ſome centuries in the primitive church, to vindicate the Chriſtians from the aſperſions of the Pagans, who called their meetings nurſeries of lewdneſs and vice, it was not intended to be a perpetual rule in the Chriſtian church, when Chriſtians and Pagans were not

not living in a mixed ſociety; and when by daily experience, that utenſil, the Repentance Stool, is found to be a cauſe of many groſs crimes. And though it is converted into a piece of money for the poor, all that is of importance in diſcipline is ſtill kept up; viz. confeſſion of ſin, profeſſion of repentance, rebuke, which, though privately tranſacted before the Kirk Seſſion, are not the leſs acceptable to God. For theſe reaſons, and that we might act like honeſt men, without partiality to people of ſtation, who will not ſubmit to a congregational appearance; I heartily wiſh it was aboliſhed. That period of our church which you ſay was once famous for the ſtrict exerciſe of diſcipline, was the moſt culpable ſince the Reformation. For they carried diſcipline higher than the ſcriptures authorized them, even to perſecution; which made many hypocrites. You ſay, the excuſes for dropping of diſcipline, in this, and other inſtances, are by no means good; which is but a begging of the queſtion. I wiſh you would publiſh a confutation of what I have here offered,

in

in your inaugural ſermon at your tranſlation to Paiſley, or the Relief Kirk at Glaſgow; one of which I am told you expect, and are preparing for it: and when you have publiſhed it, the populace will give you little thanks for it, becauſe they are not ſo intereſted in it, as in your next popular topic, viz. *Patronage.*

In ſpeaking of this article, you ſay too little to juſtify your outcry againſt it, and too much to increaſe and create diſturbance in the country. Your only argument againſt it is a ſcrap of a ſermon condemning it, and a little private chit-chat between you and another miniſter, (who always acted in ſupport of patronage in his own and other men's ſettlements and tranſportations, but, like a politician as he was, wanted to ſoothe you by pretending to be of your opinion) that patronage would be the ruin of the church of Scotland. You ought to have ſhewn what you meant by the church, and how patronage would be the ruin of it. The word Church is uſed to ſignify the houſe where the people meet to worſhip God; the clergy; and the chriſtian people.

I defy

I defy you to ſhew that in any one of theſe ſenſes patronage is or will be the ruin of the church: for the Kirks are all kept in repair; the benefices are not leſſened; and the rights of the chriſtian people are not incroached on. You ſhould have been aſhamed of ſuch a ſilly proof of patronage being the ruin of the church. But indeed you had no better arguments: for there is no place in all the ſcriptures that gives the people a right to chuſe their miniſters. And it would have been as abſurd to give them ſuch a right, as to give ſchool-boys a right to chuſe their teachers. It never was the eſtabliſhed doctrine of our church that the people had it; for it has followed the different methods of ſettling pariſhes; and the period of it which you ſo highly applaud encouraged patronage; ſee acts of Aſſembly 1638, p. 51. and acts of Aſſembly 1642. p. 99. When you thus declaimed againſt patronage, did you know the original of it, and that it was of great uſe for a fixed and regular diſpenſation of the goſpel, in

the firſt ages of chriſtianity? Then the wealthy converts built kirks, and endowed them; for which they were juſtly intitled to the patronage. And their right thereto was (as is ſtill the method) confirmed by the civil government. And as our civil government provides the benefice, it has the beſt, and a good right to preſcribe the method of ſettling kirks.

Do not think I juſtify patronage becauſe I owed my ſettlement to a preſentation. The Preſbytery records will ſhew, that I got no preſentation, and was ſettled on an unanimous call. Do not think I am ignorant of, or have forgot, the intereſt employed to procure you a promiſe from Eglinton of a preſentation to his firſt vacancy, which you would have accepted of, as all who now roar againſt patronage have done, and all candidates will do, rather than want a ſettlement. If the church ſuffer, it is entirely owing to ſuch as you; who, from an affectation of popularity, blow from the pulpit the trumpet againſt patronage, and thereby incenſe the

the populace againſt both the church and the ſtate, to the great diſpeace of the country, and hurt of religion, without any juſt ground. For patronage with us, as it is limited, can have no bad effect of itſelf on the practice of religion; and it will be no matter of enquiry at the laſt day, whether we accepted of a preſentation, or voted in favour of patronage. Popularity acquired by ſermons calculated to inflame the populace, is built on a ſandy foundation, deſpiſed by men of ſenſe and integrity, and not worth the eſteem of any wiſe men. I do not know how you have read, or do ſtill read your bible; but it is obvious to all intelligent readers of your Synodical ſermon, that in decrying the right of private judgment, and diſcouraging freedom of inquiry, and improvement in knowledge, you ſet up to be wiſer than your maſter Jeſus Chriſt, who directed his hearers to judge for themſelves, and to ſearch after truth, to prevent their being impoſed on by falſe or ignorant teachers; and reproved the Jews

for not doing it. I ſincerely wiſh you ſucceſs when you preach the truths of the goſpel, and am

Your affectionate brother."

To this was added an appendix, which has been already quoted at length.

II.

Act of Will. and Mary, Parl. 1. Seſſ. 2, Act 5. intituled, *Act ratifying the Confeſſion of Faith, and ſettling Preſbyterian Church-government.*

"Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the "King and Queen's Majeſties, and three "eſtates of parliament, conceiving it to "be their bound duty, after the great "deliverance that God hath lately "wrought for this church and kingdom; "in the firſt place to ſettle and ſecure "therein the true Proteſtant religion, "according to the truth of God's word, "as it hath of a long time been profeſſed "within this land: And alſo the govern-"ment of Chriſt's church within this

"nation,

" nation, agreeable to the word of God,
" and moſt conducive to the advance-
" ment of true piety and godlineſs, and
" the eſtabliſhing of peace and tranquil-
" lity within this realm; and that by an
" article of the claim of right it is de-
" clared, that prelacy, and the ſuperi-
" ority of any office in the church above
" Preſbyters, is and hath been a great and
" unſupportable grievance and trouble to
" this nation, and contrary to the incli-
" nations of the generality of the people
" ever ſince the reformation, (they hav-
" ing reformed from popery by Preſby-
" ters) and therefore ought to be aboliſh-
" ed; like as by an act of the laſt ſeſſion
" of this parliament, prelacy is aboliſhed.
" Therefore their Majeſties, with
" advice and conſent of the ſaid three
" eſtates, do hereby revive, ratify, and
" perpetually confirm, all laws, ſtatutes
" and acts of parliament, made againſt
" popery and papiſts, and for the main-
" tenance and preſervation of the true
" reformed proteſtant religion, and for
" the true church of Chriſt within this
" king-

" kingdom, in ſo far as they confirm the " ſame, or are made in favour thereof. " Like as, they by theſe preſents ratify " and eſtabliſh the Confeſſion of Faith, " now read in their preſence, and voted " and approven, as the public and avowed " confeſſion of this church, containing " the ſum and ſubſtance of the doctrine of " the reformed churches.

" As alſo they do eſtabliſh, ratify and " confirm the Preſbyterian church-" government and diſcipline; that is to " ſay, the government of the church by " Kirk-Seſſions, Preſbyteries, Provincial " Synods, and General Aſſemblies, rati-" fied and eſtabliſhed by the 116 act. " Ja. vi. Parl. 12. Anno 1592, intituled, " *Ratification of the liberty of the trew* " *kirk, &c.* and thereafter received, by " the general conſent of this nation, to " be the only government of Chriſt's " church within this kingdom; reviving, " renewing, and confirming the foreſaid " act of parliament."——

Act

Act Will. and Mary, Parl. 1. Sess. 4. Act 23. intituled, *Act for settling the quiet and peace of the church.*

" Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the " King and Queen's Majesties, with " advice and consent of the estates of " parliament, ratify, approve, and per- " petually confirm the fifth act of the " second session of this current parlia- " ment, intituled, Act ratifying the Con- " fession of Faith and settling Presby- " terian church-government in the whole " heads, articles, and clauses thereof: " And do further statute and ordain, " that no person be admitted, or con- " tinued for hereafter, to be a minister " or preacher within this church unless " that he subscribe the Confession of " Faith ratified in the foresaid fifth act of " the second session of this parliament, " declaring the same to be the confes- " sion of his faith, and that he owns " the doctrine therein contained, to be the " true doctrine which he will constantly " adhere to: and likewise that he owns

" and

" and acknowledges Preſbyterian church-
" government, as ſettled by the foreſaid
" fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of this
" parliament, to be the only government
" of this church, and that he will ſub-
" mit thereto, and concur therewith,
" and never endeavour, directly or indi-
" rectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion
" thereof.

" And their Majeſties with advice and
" conſent foreſaid ſtatute and ordain,
" that uniformity of worſhip, and of the
" adminiſtration of public ordinances
" within this church, be obſerved by all
" the ſaid miniſters and preachers, as the
" ſamen are at preſent performed and al-
" lowed therein, or ſhall be hereafter
" declared by the authority of the ſame,
" and that no miniſter or preacher be ad-
" mitted or continued for hereafter, un-
" leſs that he ſubſcribe to obſerve, and do
" actually obſerve the foreſaid uniſor-
" mity."

THE END.